



6 Balcony banners, e-rallies as virus curbs May Day demos



15 Virus scuppers dream weddings in Lebanon



20 Artists, athletes cling to their dreams on Havana rooftops



Ramadan KAREEM

Imsak	03:29
Fajr	03:39
Dhuhr	11:45
Asr	15:21
Maghrib	18:25
Isha	19:49



Washington approves virus drug; states ease lockdowns

Trump dig at China rattles markets as India extends lockdown

Op-Ed

UK co-hosts summit to defeat virus



By Michael Davenport
British Ambassador

The COVID-19 crisis has left no one untouched. It is having an impact both on our health and wellbeing and on our economies. A pandemic such as this requires a global response, clear leadership and a united approach. All of us want to see the development and production of medicines and vaccines to combat the virus in a sustainable way. Above all we want to ensure both that new health technologies to deal with COVID-19 are globally accessible and that no-one is left behind.

A key moment in the global effort to ensure equitable global distribution of vaccines was the creation 10 years ago of the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation (GAVI, or the Vaccine Alliance). Since then GAVI has vaccinated over 760 million children, saving 13 million lives and protecting a whole generation against some of the world's deadliest diseases.

GAVI provides immunisation support to 68 of the world's poorest countries. Its new strategy puts equity at its heart, with a commitment to vaccinate 300 million children by 2025. Sustaining immunisation coverage during the COVID-19 pandemic is crucial to avoid secondary outbreaks and further unbearable strain on health systems.

We urgently need a safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine, and work on this is continuing apace in many countries. The United Kingdom is the largest single donor of funds to the international Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) in its efforts to accelerate vaccine development. It is estimated that \$2bn will be needed for this over the next 12 months. A further \$8bn will be needed for manufacture and global distribution through GAVI.

The UK is therefore pleased to be joining the European Union and others to co-host a virtual pledging event - the Coronavirus Global Response Summit - on May 4, 2020. This event will launch a campaign to mobilise the necessary resources to accelerate work to protect the world from COVID-19.

We now need an unprecedented and inclusive partnership with all stakeholders - political leaders, public and private sector partners, civil society, academia, and all other stakeholders across society - jointly leveraging our comparative strengths and respective voices to drive towards collective solutions, an accelerated path, and access for all. We are stronger, faster and more effective working together. And we need the support of global leaders.

I have been impressed by Kuwait's speedy and firm response to COVID-19. The UK Minister of State, James Cleverly, recently called the Kuwaiti Deputy Foreign Minister Khalid Al-Jarallah to discuss the challenges of COVID-19. He praised Kuwait's generous support to the World Health Organisation in the battle against the virus. Some of that funding is earmarked for countries struggling to combat COVID-19. Kuwait is already part of our shared mission to ensure that no-one is left behind.

We do not know how long the COVID-19 crisis will continue, nor if the virus will return. We do know, however, that we must learn from one another and work together if we are to defeat this virus, roll out an effective vaccine worldwide and rebuild our economies to be both sustainable and resilient.

WASHINGTON: American authorities have approved an experimental drug for emergency use on coronavirus patients, as more US states eased pandemic lockdowns despite another spike in deaths from the disease. The approval is the latest step in a global push to find viable treatments and a vaccine for the coronavirus, which has left half of humanity under some form of lockdown, hammered the world economy and infected more than 3.3 million people.

Remdesivir, an antiviral drug initially developed to treat Ebola, was given the green light on Friday after a major trial found that it boosted recovery in serious COVID-19 patients. "It's really a very promising situation," President Donald Trump said on Friday at the White House, where he was joined by Daniel O'Day, CEO of Gilead Sciences, which developed Remdesivir. The drug incorporates itself into the virus's genome, short-circuiting its replication process.

Its approval came as the US leaders struggled with growing pressure from citizens wearying of stay-at-home orders. With about 1.1 million confirmed coronavirus cases and nearly 65,000 deaths, the United States has the highest tolls of any country, and Trump is keen for a turnaround as the world's largest economy reels with tens of millions left jobless.

Continued on Page 16



SAN DIEGO: A demonstrator holding an anti-Trump sign pretends to drink from a bottle of bleach during a rally to reopen California and against stay-at-home directives on Friday. — AFP

Kuwait keen on supporting workers' rights

KUWAIT: Kuwait is committed to supporting its labor and protecting their rights and syndicates, ensuring job growth, development and prosperity for all, a minister said on Friday. "The working class has proven, during this crisis and the unpre-

cedented circumstances that the country is going through, that it has nationalistic pride, high efficiency and unlimited exceptionalism," Minister of Social Affairs Maryam Al-Aqeel said on the occasion of International Workers Day.

Governments, business-owners and employees are doubling their efforts to face the impacts of COVID-19, and the minister hailed employees and Kuwaiti trade unions as the foundation of the development and prosperity of civilizations. "We have all witnessed the great role these people play, whether those on

the frontline or those who have participated in volunteer work as well as those who have expressed their willingness to work hard and diligently for the sake of their country," she said.

Aqeel underlined that Kuwait is keen on implementing global standards for work and workers, signing numerous International Labor Organization-approved agreements since its independence that aim to preserve the rights of workers and ensure their safety. It has also been committed to regulating the relationship between employer and employee. — KUNA



Maryam Al-Aqeel

Kim reappears after weeks of speculation

SEOUL: North Korea's Kim Jong Un has made his first public appearance in nearly three weeks, state media reported yesterday, following intense speculation that the leader of the nuclear-armed nation was seriously ill or possibly dead. State television showed Kim walking, smiling broadly and smoking a cigarette at what the North said was the opening of a fertilizer factory on Friday in Suncheon,

north of Pyongyang.

Rumors about Kim's health have been swirling since his conspicuous no-show at April 15 celebrations for the birthday of his grandfather, the North's founder - the most important day in the country's political calendar. His absence triggered a series of fevered rumors and unconfirmed reports over his condition, while the United States and South Korea insisted they had no information to believe any of the conjecture was true. Seoul's unification ministry reacted to yesterday's report by saying "groundless" speculation about Kim had caused "unnecessary confusion", calling for more careful consideration in future.

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SOUTH PYONGAN, North Korea: This picture taken on Friday and released yesterday shows North Korean leader Kim Jong Un visiting the completed Suchon phosphate fertilizer factory. — AFP

Qat markets in Yemen flourish despite virus

SANAA: While many of the world's markets have closed to curb the spread of coronavirus, in Yemen's capital Sanaa, downtown districts selling qat - the ubiquitous mild narcotic - still bustle with people. Flouting social distancing rules, Yemenis jostle to select bunches of the chewable leaf from vendors packed into the narrow lanes crowded with stalls.

"If the qat markets were closed, believe me when I say that 98 percent of Yemeni people would object,"

Sanaa resident and avid consumer Ali Al-Zubeiry told AFP. "We appeal to the authorities not to close the qat markets because Yemenis live off it," he said - while adding it would probably be a good idea to move them to a more open space.

Yemen, mired in civil war since 2014 and long the Arabian Peninsula's poorest nation, is a major producer and consumer of qat, which is banned in some countries but has been part of Yemen's social fabric for thousands of years. The country was once best known for its coffee industry, but the easy profits from qat meant it eclipsed that trade and spread into other agricultural lands - around the Red Sea and in African countries such as Ethiopia and Somalia where it also flourishes.

Continued on Page 16



SANAA: A Yemeni vendor sorts through leaves of qat at a market in the capital on Friday. — AFP

Local

Kuwait FM discusses coronavirus with ICRC

Sheikh Dr Ahmad hosts Sri Lankan envoy

KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah received on Friday a telephone-visual call from President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Peter Maurer, discussing spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) worldwide. Maurer expressed deep appreciation for the pioneering and distinguished role played by the State of Kuwait in support of afflicted people and its eminent humanitarian status at the regional and international levels, led by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

He lauded effective measures taken by the State of Kuwait in facing the novel coronavirus, safeguarding citizens and residents, expressing gratitude for its continuing support for the ICRC for service of humanitarian work and objectives throughout the world. Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser praised the ICRC humanitarian efforts, namely the close and high-level coordination between the State of Kuwait and the Red Cross. The long distance contact involved the assistant foreign minister for affairs of the foreign minister bureau, Ambassador Saleh Al-Loughani, the assistant foreign minister for international organizations' affairs minister plenipotentiary Nasser Al-Hayen and a number of senior officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Meanwhile, Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser



KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah participates in a video conference call with President of the International Committee of the Red Cross Peter Maurer. — KUNA photos

Al-Mohammad on Thursday participated in a virtual extraordinary Arab ministerial meeting. Requested by Palestine, the event addressed Arab action against Israel's plan to annex the West Bank or part of it, and to impose its hegemony on the West Bank and on illegal settlements in Palestinian territories that were occupied in 1967.

FM hosts envoy

In the meantime, Sheikh Dr Ahmad

Nasser Al-Mohammad received Sri Lanka's Ambassador in Kuwait Othman Jawhar on Thursday. During the encounter, the Kuwaiti minister delivered Jawhar a written letter from His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah to his Sri Lankan counterpart Mahendra Rajapaksa. The letter discussed bilateral relations between both friendly countries and joint cooperation in the fight against COVID-19.



Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets with Sri Lanka's Ambassador Othman Jawhar.

Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad also received a call from his counterpart in Maldives Abdullah Shahid, in which they congratulated each other on the holy month of Ramadan. During the phone conversation, both ministers tackled bilateral ties between both friendly countries and joint cooperation on how to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus.

Moreover, Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad on Thursday contacted his Sudanese counterpart Asma Abdul-

lah, congratulating her on the holy month of Ramadan. During the phone conversation, both ministers discussed close relations between both brotherly countries and ways of further promoting bilateral cooperation in the fight against the novel coronavirus. The Kuwaiti foreign minister prayed to Allah Almighty that Arabs, Muslims and the entire humanity would be relieved of this pandemic and all patients would recover very soon. — KUNA

Pandemic Diaries

Human trafficking



By Jamie Etheridge

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The government amnesty offered to residency violators living in Kuwait illegally wrapped up registrations on Thursday, with unofficial counts indicating that more than 23,000 individuals signed up to be deported. Around 20,000 of these people remain in detention camps in Kuwait, their home countries refusing to allow them to return home.

Imagine wanting to go home but being prevented from doing so. Imagine being stuck abroad, even if it were the most beautiful place on earth, and missing your family back home. In times of crisis, it is our natural inclination to want to go home.

Home can be a tricky concept. For most people, home is the place where they grew up, the place where their parents and other immediate family members still reside. This doesn't hold true for everyone. Home can be people rather than place. It can be more than one place. And for a few, home is wherever they are.

During a pandemic, people want security. They want to feel safe and in a place where survival is possible. For those seeking amnesty, Kuwait become untenable when the economy shut down and people started losing their jobs.

The number may seem small - 23,000 is suspected to be only a fraction of the number of people living here illegally. Tens of thousands are thought to have been brought by visa traders, human traffickers profiting from desperate job-seekers.

Those who have registered to go home are lucky - at least they have a place to live and food to eat. Those who are now jobless, illegal and locked inside the isolated areas of Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and Mahboula are facing a desperate situation. Although the government is trying to manage, the reality is that there are simply too many people living here illegally, working menial jobs and just trying to survive.

The situation shows in stark contrast the reality that Kuwait must change. Allowing large numbers of foreign labor, especially unskilled labor without real jobs, to be imported creates a nightmare scenario for the workers and for the government. It leads to an overburdening of the government's healthcare system and bureaucracies and fuels petty crime, poor living conditions and illicit employment.

Lawmakers are now calling for change and hopefully there will be real efforts to stop human trafficking, but for those stuck here - both the ones waiting for the chance to go home and those still living illegally - the change can't come fast enough.

Coronavirus in Kuwait: What we know so far

KUWAIT: Kuwait has recorded 4,377 cases infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) as of Friday, in addition to 30 deaths. With the exception of 70 cases in intensive care, all infected cases are in stable condition and are recovering in quarantined locations designated by the government for this purpose, while hundreds have been discharged from quarantine after exhibiting no symptoms during their 14-day quarantine period, the Ministry of Health confirmed. Meanwhile, 1,602 people have recovered completely after previously being infected with the virus, while there are 2,745 people receiving treatment and 3,288 quarantined. 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 to test people for possible infection.

Curfew

Kuwait enforced a country-wide curfew from 5:00 pm to 6:00 am, which was later extended to start from 4:00 pm until 8:00 am during Ramadan, while allowing restaurants and food stores to make home deliveries from 5:00 pm until 1:00 am. The government also locked down Mahboula and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh in a bid to contain the spread of the virus and enable health workers to test inhabitants. Earlier, the government decided to close all shopping malls, beauty salons and barber shops as part of its measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. The government also allowed supermarkets, restaurants and shops to host a maximum of five people at a time and in case there are lines, the distance must be at least one meter between people. The Ministry of Commerce launched a website (www.moci.shop) to enable people to book appointments to shop at co-operative societies in their areas. The Public Authority for Industry also announced that companies can apply to evacuate their workers from Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and Mahboula. To do so, they must fill a 'workers evacuation form' available on www.pai.gov.kw, and send the form via email to: Jasiri@moh.gov.kw.

Precautions

Kuwait halted all commercial flights until further notice, and has sent special flights to repatriate Kuwaitis back home from countries affected with the virus' spread. 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. Meanwhile, the Cabinet announced on April 9 the operation of all airline flights for expats who are wishing to return back to their countries. Authorities also announced a public holiday in the country from March 12 to May 28, with work resuming on May 31, while entities providing vital services will remain open. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education has suspended classes 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. 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.

Hotlines

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

The Education Ministry set the following hotlines to

receive inquiries on school closures related to the anti-coronavirus measures:

- 24970967 (24/7 hotline)
- 51575591 (Capital Educational Zone)
- 51576117 (Hawally Educational Zone)
- 51576576 (Farwaniya Educational Zone)
- 51577055 (Jahra Educational Zone)
- 51577655 (Ahmadi Educational Zone)
- 51577951 (Mubarak Al-Kabeer Educational Zone)
- 51578171 (Religious Studies Department)
- 51588599 (Private Education Department)
- 51592515 (Services Department)
- 51594544 (Public Relations Department)

Medicine delivery

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

- Amiri Hospital: 50880699
- Mubarak Al-Kabeer Hospital: 50880755
- Farwaniya Hospital: 50880852
- Adan Hospital: 50880908
- Jahra Hospital: 50881066
- Sabah Hospital: 97632660
- Jaber Hospital: 96992079
- Ibn Sina Hospital: 99613948
- Chest Hospital: 99258749
- Razi Hospital: 97633487
- Kuwait Cancer Control Center: 96735242
- Psychiatric Hospital: 97350113
- Physiotherapy Hospital: 99824037
- Maternity Hospital: 98559531
- As'ad Al-Hamad Dermatology Center: 98514508
- Zain Hospital: 97552031
- NBK Hospital: 96931761
- Al-Rashed Allergy Hospital: 94162470
- Infectious Diseases Hospital: 96989164
- Palliative Care Hospital: 94024786
- Sabah Al-Ahmad Urology Center: 90952469
- KFH Addiction Treatment Center: 94169363

Meanwhile, all licensed pharmacies in Kuwait delivering medicine are allowed to continue their services 24 hours a day. The Ministry of Health is also asking doctors and nurses affiliated with the private medical sector to volunteer in order to contribute to the fight against the virus. Volunteering is available through the link: <http://volunteering.q8-ehealth.com>. The ministry had closed all private clinics and medical centers effective March 22, 2020 until further notice.

Mental health assistance

The Kuwait Psychological Association (KPA) is providing consultation through the phone for people suffering from the psychological impacts of coronavirus. Different doctors are working on the hotline in different timings as follows:

- **Dr Rashed Al-Sahl:** on Monday and Wednesday 10:00 am - 1:00 pm. Call 9797-6168.
 - **Dr Fahad Al-Tasha:** daily from 8:00 pm - 12:00 am. Call 9904-8258.
 - **Dr Othman Al-Asfour:** daily 5:00 pm - 8:00 pm. Call 9938-5350.
 - **Dr Mohammed Al-Khalidi (head of this team):** daily 9:00 am - 12:00 pm. Call 9903-6470.
 - **Dr Ahmad Al-Khalidi:** daily 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm. Call 9910-7965.
 - **Dr Muneera Al-Qattan:** Monday and Wednesday 9:00 am - 1:00 pm. Call 9953-3108.
 - **Dr Zainab Al-Saffar:** Sunday and Thursday 7:00 pm - 9:00 pm. Call 9954-9908.
 - **Dr Sameera Al-Kandari:** Tuesday 9:00 pm - 12:00 am. Call 6770-9434.
 - **Dr Kawthar Al-Yaqout:** Monday and Wednesday 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm. Call 5521-0088.
- For information and other concerns, call 9401-4283.

Local Spotlight

Future of aviation



By Muna Al-Fuzai

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Traveling via airports now seems like a dream, because no one can set a precise date of when all airports can and will be back to normal as before the coronavirus outbreak. I am wondering how this virus will change aviation protocol and future travel. These days, most airports are shut down except for cargo and emergency flights. Most reports about well-known airlines seem uncertain of when and how this situation will be over for good. Some media reports said many airlines are trying to figure out new technologies and safe methods to get the aviation industry back to work safely.

If this is true, I guess the pandemic will help create new business and investment opportunities to reshape a new concept of safe traveling as an outcome of the ongoing outbreak. We are stronger now and prepared for any shocks, and this should lead us to reshape new ideas about traveling. I believe it is time to adopt new ways for many reasons.

Traveling in the past often meant long and crowded queues, especially during the holiday seasons, including for collecting luggage. The plane was often very crowded and passengers sticking to each other was a regular matter, especially in the economy class. But I think this will change forever, because keeping a distance is a global demand not only at airports, but everywhere, and unless measures change, the number of passengers will undoubtedly decrease.

I think the pandemic will accelerate changing traveling methods to move towards a stronger adoption of new technologies. I think this is the right time with a drop in jet fuel prices, but it also means that the crisis is still ongoing and traveling for vacations, for example, is not possible, especially with international airports making cuts in their budgets and number of workers, and even car rental companies.

Maybe some new changes in operations will be the new normal in the near future. For example, expanding the use of drones for deliveries. I believe that easing some restrictions in this field is required now. Companies who wish to use drones either within the airport or even outside can get a permit. Recently, we saw a video of a pizza delivery by drone, so why not make it easier to register and for official entities to use this method for airport inspection and cargo.

Change is a must and if the virus will force the world to make new changes for the good, so why not. We are in 2020 and still educating people to wash their hands and stay clean, so if this dilemma has taught us something, it is that people still need to be redirected to new methods to stay safe and healthy and for travel too.

Another thing that I think is needed now is to adopt compulsory online check-in and wrapping bags, while keeping a distance between passengers on the plane with masks and gloves for protection from germs. I personally believe aviation as an industry may suffer now, but I expect it to be modified for the best soon. Maybe changes in aviation protocols are expensive and uncomfortable due to public concern for diseases, yet keeping passengers safe and healthy is a goal.

Local

Prime Minister visits Shlonik app Operations Center, Contact Unit

Bader Al-Kharafi: 'Shlonik' very effective in monitoring compliance of home quarantine

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, puts its resources and technological capabilities at the disposal of the state contributing to the activation of the preventive and safety measures implemented by the Ministry of Health and other bodies to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. This commitment by Zain comes within the framework of the high directives of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, to address this pandemic.

The company made the statements on the occasion of the inspection visit by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah to the Operations Center and Contact Unit for the implementation of Shlonik app (translates to 'how are you' in the Kuwaiti dialect) during which he was accompanied by the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior, and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Khaled Al-Saleh, Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Humoud Al-Sabah, and Minister of State for Municipal Affairs and head of the Technology Support Team for the Shlonik app Waleed Al-Jassem, in the presence of Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi, as well as a number of leaders of the Ministry of Health and the teams responsible for the follow-up center operations.



Technology supports govt efforts

The Shlonik application was launched by the Ministry of Health (Molh) in cooperation with Zain and the Central Agency for Information Technology (CAIT), utilizing the latest tech solutions to monitor the compliance of citizens who recently returned to Kuwait with regards to home-quarantine directives, as well as following up on their health status, their movements and the people who come in contact with them.

Mechanisms of work

During the inspection tour of the center, His Highness was briefed on the mechanisms of work of the Shlonik application, where the officials of the call center reconfirmed the application as an effective tool to address this epidemic, and to help enable the country to gradually return to a normal life in a safer way.

His Highness expressed his appreciation for the Shlonik monitoring procedures, and the efforts made by all government and private sectors involved in the process of launching, follow-up and communication

of the application. Moreover, His Highness reemphasized the directives of His Highness the Amir to take all measures and expedite the return of citizens during the month of Ramadan while at the same time protecting the health of the community in Kuwait.

Zain Vice Chairman and Group CEO, Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi said: "The exceptional circumstances that the country is going through due to the COVID-19 pandemic requires everyone to unite all efforts and initiatives to confront this crisis."

Kharafi pointed out that Kuwait is one of the first countries to take strict precautionary measures to limit the spread of this epidemic, stating: "The Shlonik application has been very effective in monitoring the home-quarantine directives and compliance of citizens who recently returned to Kuwait, as well as following up on their health status, their movements and the people who come in contact with them."

Moreover, Kharafi highlighted that in recent times, healthcare has witnessed a massive influx of information technology, a vital enabler for countries and societies, especially in times of crisis. Whether it be in building an integrated database or helping in the stages of analysis, prevention and treatment, many times technology has saved countless lives because of predictive models and analytical data that rely on artificial intelligence.

It is worth noting that Zain participated in the work efforts of establishing the Operations Management Center of the Ministry of Health, where it trained the technical teams charged with managing the work mechanism during this exceptional period, working closely with these teams to reach the best possible operating models.

Five different languages

Developed locally by national talents, the Shlonik application is available in five different languages, Arabic, English, Urdu, Tagalog, and Bengali. The registration process is very simple, the user must enter the mobile phone number and the civil ID number, and once the individual subject to home quarantine arrives home from Kuwait International airport, they will complete the first check-in verification process through the application to inform the specialized team from the Ministry of Health of their arrival at the home, and the start of the home quarantine period.



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah inspecting Shlonik Operations Center with presence of Ministers and Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi.

The second step begins with locating the home quarantine on the map, recording an audio clip, and taking a photo that clearly shows the features of their face, until the identity is matched using artificial intelligence technology when completing future check-ins. The application is the primary communication tool between the quarantined citizen and the Ministry of Health staff assigned to monitor their compliance, where the specialized medical team communicates with the citizen at least twice daily to check on their health.

In support of the comprehensive awareness campaign being conducted by the country's various institutions further supporting the government's evacuation plan and home quarantine instructions, Zain Kuwait changed its network's name to Shlonik. This followed a previous step that Zain undertook with the start of the Ministry of Health's efforts to urge to stay at home to combat COVID-19, whereby the company changed its network name to STAY HOME, to remind its customers of the importance of staying at home as much as possible, and to contribute to the eradication of this pandemic.



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah tours a field hospital set up to receive COVID-19 patients. —KUNA photos

PM inspects field hospitals, quarantine facilities

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah inspected, on Thursday, field hospitals and quarantine facilities constructed as part of efforts to counter the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in Kuwait. His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled visited first the facility in Al-Ardhiya, which was erected in coordination between the ministries of Health and Public Works. He then inspected the facility in Mishref, which was established by the Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) and Kuwait Integrated Petroleum Industries Company (KIPIIC). His Highness the Prime Minister thanked all those who participated in the efforts to establish the facilities, saying that it came in line with directives of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in this regard. Several state officials and ministers accompanied His Highness the Prime Minister during the inspection. —KUNA



In my view

A salute to women

By Abdellatif Sharaa

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December 2019 was the month that brought the news about the birth of a new coronavirus, and many of us, if not all, started talking about it as if we were immune or far from it and it would not reach us, bearing in mind that it was in China. But Corona was much smarter than us, and soon enough its babies were everywhere, covering the four corners of the globe. Governments had to move forcefully and declare war against the virus, and decisions started to be made all the way to enforcing partial and total curfews.

Now, men who used to spend much of their time at work or with friends found themselves at home because of the curfews, something they are not used to, nor their women, which created problems, because men started to disturb their ladies' daily routine, interfering with their cleaning, cooking and caring for their children, even making sure the school-going kids remain in touch with learning online for those who choose to do so.

We must salute the great women who turned their homes into playgrounds, restaurants, hotels and leisure outlets for family members; in fact, women are the unknown soldiers during crises, and they are the security providers as the coronavirus creates fears outside. Women at homes are almost the only family members who are always asked questions: What do we have for lunch? Where are my games, mama? I am hungry, mama; I am bored, mama; I want this and I want that... mama!

Oh, you poor mother, first of all, may Allah bless you, then please make sure to get some time alone away from all the noise and demands. You must not get angry, and avoid being nervous, while remembering that you are the most important element around - in fact you are the first line of defense. I can't stop saying that women were subject to injustice for a long time, and are still not receiving their dues at home, and are the first to be blamed if something goes wrong, regardless of what it may be.

Mothers are the source of warmth, love and sacrifice - they are the ones who care about the comfort of their children. A mother instills values, self-confidence and courage, and directs them to the right path of success. Is it not that when you fall, your mother will ask whether you are ok or not, while others most likely will ask what happened?

The mother's heart is a flower that never wilts; we are indebted to them for all the achievements that we made, and who will keep treating us as their babies until their last breath. Thank you mothers of the world!

"Successful mothers are not the ones that have never struggled; they are the ones that never give up, despite the struggles." - Sharon Jaynes

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed

Kuwait Times

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Amnesty deadline ends, low turnout predicted



KUWAIT: People from different nationalities queue up Thursday outside a school in Farwaniya which was turned into a center to receive applications of violators wishing to avail the amnesty. — Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh

KUWAIT: An amnesty Kuwait provided for residency violators ended on Thursday, as people from different nationalities headed to centers in Farwaniya and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh set up by the Ministry of Interior to receive expatriates without valid residencies. The amnesty allowed residency violators to leave the country between April 1 and April 30 without paying any fines or airfare with a chance to return to Kuwait later. Applicants from all nationalities are received on April 26 - 30. The amnesty started with receiving Filipino applicants on April 1 - 5, followed by Egyptians on April 6 - 10, Bangladeshis on April 11 - 15, Indians on April 16 - 20, and Sri Lankans on April 21 - 25. Although the Interior Ministry is yet to announce the total number of applicants, early estimations indicate that only 30,000 out of around 160,000 people living illegally in Kuwait have availed the amnesty. The timing of the amnesty, which came at a time in which air travel has been suspended around the world due to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) spread, has been blamed as the main reason for its failure to reach its desired goal.



KRCS doles out food parcels to Jleeb laborers

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) has distributed 1,000 food packages and 250 frozen chicken boxes to residents and workers in the coronavirus locked down area of Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh in Farwaniya governorate. Each package contains a variety of basic foodstuff sufficient to feed a family of five members for a month, KRCS Director General Abdulrahman Al-Oun said. He pointed out that the KRCS is keen on supporting the government's efforts to control the novel coronavirus spread and to help citizens and residents who are affected by the lockdown and other preventive measures. The KRCS is also coordinating with the Ministry of Interior to distribute ready-made meals and food parcels to tradesmen and itinerant workers in the fully isolated districts of Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and Al-Mahboula. The heavily populated areas of Jleeb Al Shuyoukh and Mahboula, where predominantly expatriate laborers live, have been placed in complete isolation since April 6 after being emerged as hotspots for the coronavirus. — KUNA



News in brief

Bank employee tests positive

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait announced that one of its employees in Mishref branch tested positive for novel coronavirus (COVID-19). After contacting the Ministry of Health, the bank has taken all necessary measures, NBK said, adding that the employee is currently under close observation and is in stable condition. NBK has immediately taken all preventive measures to isolate the employees who have been in direct contact with him, and closed the branch to sterilize it entirely, it noted.

Co-op volunteer infected

KUWAIT: Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh Co-op Society announced that one of the volunteers tested positive for coronavirus. The co-op will be closed and the delivery service will be suspended temporarily, it added. Meanwhile, Kuwait TV denied claims on social media that one of its employees tested positive for coronavirus. The Ministry of Information affirmed that its employees are in good health.

Food distribution

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Union of Farmers distributed Friday boxes of vegetables to citizens in the isolated area in Mahboula. The distribution was done in cooperation with Kuwait military forces, who accompanied the trucks from Al-Wafra farms to citizens' houses.

Guardsmen hurt in hit-and-run

KUWAIT: An individual who breached curfew hours has deliberately run over a Kuwait National Guard member, causing him injury, at a vehicle checkpoint in Jahra Governorate. Responding to reports on the incident, the Kuwait National Guard, in a statement on Friday, said that legal action will be taken against the individual. The Kuwait National Guard member was injured in the hand. Separately, General Traffic Department police arrested two drivers who drove recklessly during the curfew hours.

Kuwait deplores attack

KUWAIT: An official source at the Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry on Friday strongly condemned an attack on an armored vehicle in North Sinai in Egypt, which left a number of soldiers killed or injured. The source said that such criminal acts that target Egypt's security and stability would not undermine its determination to fight violence and terrorism in all forms. Kuwait stands by Egypt and backs all measures it is taking to protect its security and stability, and safeguard public security, according to the source. It offered heartfelt and sincere condolences to the families of the victims and wished a swift recovery of the injured.

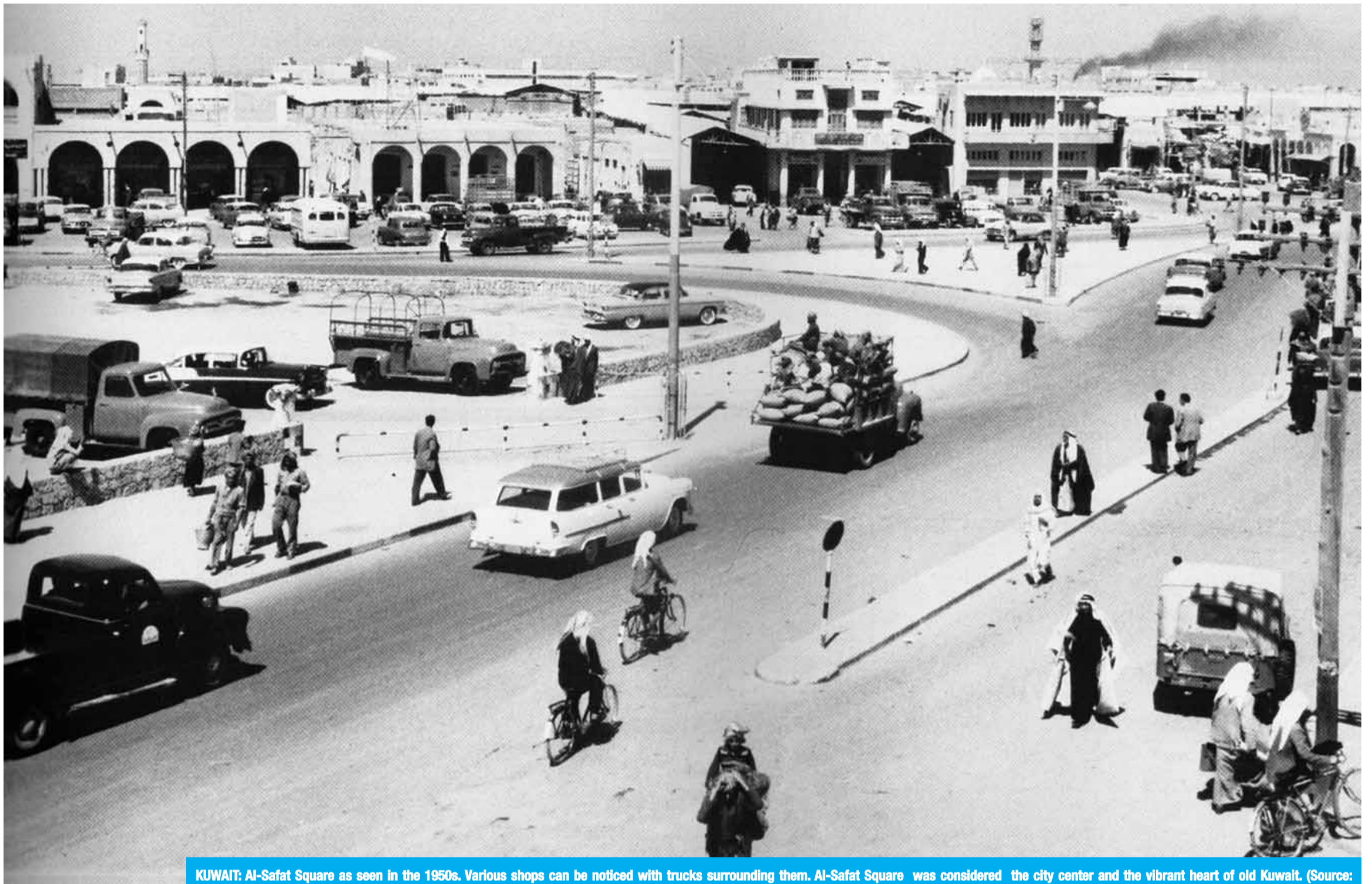
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Local

Kuwait Heritage



KUWAIT: Al-Safat Square as seen in the 1950s. Various shops can be noticed with trucks surrounding them. Al-Safat Square was considered the city center and the vibrant heart of old Kuwait. (Source: 'Kuwait.. In Black and White,' by Basem Al-Loughani, Kuwait, 2008. Prepared by: Mahmoud Aakarfa Abu Alella, researcher in heritage, Ministry of Information)

Struggle against the soul

By Hassan Twaha Bwambale

'Self' or 'Soul' is our staunchest enemy who is continuously at war with us with reason. In order to defeat the self and to control our passions, we must fight hard by strictly following the commands of Allah (SWT) and Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). It is very important to prevent our souls from acts that are far from worshipping Allah Almighty.

There are three types of the soul, they are:

- a. The commanding soul that always encourages humans to disobey Allah the Almighty.
 - b. The self-reproaching soul that will always blame the individual for lagging behind in acts of obedience and for committing sins. It feels conscious of evil and resists it - among others.
 - c. The tranquil soul. This soul is in complete rest and satisfaction. This is the soul the prophets and messengers and the extremely sincere worshippers of Allah (the Majestic and Almighty).
- Struggle against the soul is trying hard to defy evil ideas, desires and powers of lust, anger, and insatiable imagination, placing all of them under the dictates of reason and faith in obedience to Allah's commands, and finally, purging all satanic ideas and influences from one's soul. Allah (the Majestic and Almighty) says what can be translated as: "And by the soul and He who proportioned it (in due measure.) And inspired it (with the discernment of) its wickedness and righteousness. He succeeds who purified it and fails who corrupts it." (Ash-Shams 91: 8 - 10)

- We understand from the verse above that Allah Almighty balanced and refined it and created in it consciousness. It is our role as humans to keep it clean.
- Al-Imam Ibn Al-Qayyim said, "There are four levels of Jihad (struggle): Struggle against the enemies who wage war against Muslims unjustifiably and the hypocrites, struggle against one's own self (soul), and struggle against the devil." Struggle against the soul is achieved by learning about Allah Almighty and Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), then implementing that knowledge as well as controlling your whims and desires, among others.
- Fudhala bin Ubaid narrated that

Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said, "The deeds of everyone who dies are sealed, except for the one who dies in Allah's cause, guarding the frontier of Muslims from their enemy. Indeed, his actions are increased for him until the Day of Judgment, and he is secure from the tribulations of the grave. And I heard Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) saying, 'The (real) Mujahid (struggler) is one who strives against his own soul.'" (Al-Albani rated it as Saheeh (authentic in Saheeh Abi Dawud # 2, 500 and Saheeh At-Tirmidhi # 1, 621)

What can one do in order to control his psyche, ego and emotions?

Answer: You are advised to follow the following steps:

1. **Self-evaluation:** A sincere and serious believer has to evaluate himself/herself on a daily basis to get rid of bad habits and aberrant whims and desires, and to sincerely perform better actions than before.
2. **Guarding against evil:** If you are serious in struggling against your own self and psyche, you should constantly concentrate on your intentions. If at any point evil suggestions to disobey Allah (the Almighty) creep into your mind, you should know that evil whispers of Satan and his evil forces. Tell the Devil that this day of Ramadan or any other day, you have vowed not to violate God's commands. And with Allah's help, Satan will be kicked out.
3. **Reflection:** As a believer, you need to devote some time every day to contemplate about your duties towards God, Who brought you to this world and creating everything for you (Qur'an 2: 29). Your purpose in this life is to worship Allah, which implies that everything you do, say, and think is for the sole purpose of seeking Allah's pleasure.
4. **Firm resolve:** This is the essence of humanity and basic requirement to attain freedom from the domination of evil desires. It is synonymous with laying the foundation of a good life. Ibn Al-Qayyim said that 'Al-Ihsan' (perfect worship) is divided into three categories, the first of which is a pure intention, which should be adorned by knowledge, strengthened by firm resolve and cleared from ulterior motives. For example, having the intention to pray alone isn't enough. With that intention, learn how to pray, do not procrastinate, and avoid doing it for show off.
- Courtesy of the TIES Center: the TIES Center aims at empower Kuwait's expats through social and educational services that promote a positive and productive role in society, and to facilitate opportunities for intra- and interfaith interactions that promote social solidarity. For more information, you can contact TIES at Tel:25231015/6; Hotline:94079777; e-mail: info@tiescenter.net.

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Taliban steps up attacks on Afghan forces since deal

Why North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's health matters



BUENOS AIRES: Members of Polo Obrero social organization protest at Plaza de Mayo square holding banners during a May Day demonstration in Buenos Aires, Argentina on May 1, 2020. — AFP

Pandemic curbs May Day demos

Workers mark May Day with balcony banners, e-rallies

HAVANA: Workers of the world scaled back their traditional May Day demos Friday with coronavirus lockdowns forcing many to rally online while a determined few hit the streets in face masks. There were arrests in the Philippines, Russia, Chile and Turkey, a riot in Indonesia and pepper spray in Hong Kong as some broke confinement rules to hold public assemblies.

But from Havana to Helsinki and beyond, most gatherings on this unusual Labor Day were small and without incident. Cuba's celebrations were muted after the ruling Communist Party urged people to celebrate at home. Around a million workers and their families normally take part in the annual May Day march, but on Friday, the iconic image of Che Guevara gazed down on an eerily silent Revolution Square in Havana.

Elsewhere in Latin America, labor unions in Honduras called for an end to the country's "monstrous corruption" and workers carrying a banner reading "No Quarantine with Hunger" marched on government buildings in Buenos Aires. In Chile, police arrested dozens after protesters assembled in Santiago's Plaza Italia in defiance of a prohibition on public gatherings of more than 50 people. With strict social distancing rules in most countries, many union leaders opted to delay gatherings or move events online because of the COVID-19 outbreak that has killed more than 233,000 people worldwide.

May Day carried extra significance this year after

the epidemic sent the global economy into a tailspin, put unprecedented numbers of people out of work, and cast some of the world's lower-paid workers—nurses, garbage collectors, shop tellers and delivery drivers—in the role of modern-day heroes. "It is thanks to the labor we celebrate on this day that the nation perseveres," said President Emmanuel Macron of France, where workers celebrated the



Unions call for an end to monstrous corruption

popular holiday by banging pots, singing, displaying banners from their balconies and taking part in on-line demonstrations.

Covered mouths have a voice

In Turkey, some two dozen mask-wearing protesters including a senior union leader were arrested for taking part in a small march in Istanbul in violation of lockdown measures, an AFP photographer witnessed.

Hundreds of Greek workers rallied outside parliament, wearing red scarves over their faces or masks bearing messages of solidarity with health workers. "Covered mouths still have a voice," read some. In the Philippines, police detained at least three people as small groups of protesters banged on empty pots and held up placards demanding government aid and safe working conditions, in defiance of a ban on public gatherings.

Some 23 million people—nearly a quarter of the population—faced hunger due to "no work, no pay" provisions in their employment contracts, Jerome Adonis of the May First Movement labor movement told AFP. A riot broke out in Indonesia's North Maluku province when employees of a nickel processing plant were barred from entering the compound to stage a protest demanding better working conditions, according to an AFP journalist at the scene. The company's canteen building was set on fire as hundreds of workers clashed with security guards.

'We've had to get creative'

In Finland, traditional communal picnics were replaced by restaurants offering livestreams of wine tastings or cocktail-making lessons, and serving up traditional May Day food for home delivery. "We've had to get creative and try and find new ways that we can still interact and create togetherness," Helsinki restaurateur Filippo Phoumsavanh said. Italians too greeted May Day in unusual fashion. A traditional

concert on Rome's San Giovanni Square was replaced with a virtual performance broadcast live on public television for four hours until midnight.

In Hong Kong, meanwhile, riot police deployed with rubber bullets and tear gas after democracy activists threatened to defy a ban on gatherings to hold pro-democracy protests. The streets remained largely empty, but hundreds did gather in a shopping mall in the town of Shatin, chanting slogans and waving protest flags. Riot police used pepper spray to disperse them.

Police also deployed in large numbers in Germany to enforce a prohibition on gatherings of more than 20 people. Zaragoza in northern Spain was the scene of an unusual rally—May Day demonstrators formed up in a long line of cars, each with a single occupant sporting gloves and a mask. In Vienna, a few hundred people standing one meter (a little over three feet) apart gathered at the chancellery to demand an end to the coronavirus lockdown, bearing signs reading: "We don't want dictatorship."

Three far-right activists were arrested on a bridge near the Kremlin in Moscow where they tried to mount a protest, according to the Left Front movement, critical of President Vladimir Putin. Several hundred people gathered on Martyrs' Square in Beirut, Lebanon, where economic hardship has fueled public anger at the government. "I came because I am hungry, I am tired of this life," said Mohamed Ali, 25, who lost his job and said he has not a cent to his name. — AFP

WHO targets teens on social media to debunk virus myths

GENEVA: The World Health Organization said Friday it was working with social media companies in a bid to quash misinformation about the coronavirus pandemic—including on more light-hearted apps popular with teenagers. The WHO said it had started working with TikTok and Snapchat since the pandemic broke out in a bid to reach out to teen and younger social messaging app users. "We're battling misinformation every day," said Andy Pattison, the UN health agency's digital solutions manager.

On social media, "false stories outperform the truth on every single subject" in how far and how quickly they spread, he told a virtual press briefing. The WHO is therefore attempting to combat falsehoods with science-based messages through the most commonly-used social media apps, he said. Aleksandra Kuzmanovic, the WHO's social media manager, said the organization had also established a presence on TikTok and Snapchat during the COVID-19 pandemic, because most of its followers on previous platforms were in the 25 to 35 age bracket.

"On TikTok and Snapchat, we are now reaching audiences that are much younger," she said. "It was important for us to communicate with teenagers how they can protect themselves. We are a science-based organization that has serious information and TikTok is a platform that is perceived as funny—people

share funny videos and information." Kuzmanovic said the challenge was how to put across serious, educational information on TikTok. "With their help, we adjusted some of our video products to be suitable to the platform," she said.

Google, YouTube filtering

The WHO has its own dedicated COVID-19 "Myth busters" page, directly debunking popular rumors about the virus, which has killed more than 230,000 people worldwide and infected over 3.2 million. Pattison said the WHO was working on chatbot features with WhatsApp, Viber, Facebook Messenger and Apple

Business Chat, but hoped to open channels on up to 30 such apps to take into account the most popular ones in various countries, such as Line in Japan. "It's really important that we reach millions of people directly in their own language," he said.

Pattison said that the WHO was partnering with YouTube to try to remove harmful misinformation and eliminate scientifically baseless rumors, in a two-way relationship. YouTube gives the WHO insights into trending COVID-19 rumors and the UN agency tells them which are harmless and which might be dangerous. Pattison said Google was working with the WHO so that searches for COVID-19 produced news from credible outlets and local in-country health information. "They've been very good at finding the right balance," he said. — AFP

WHO says virus 'natural in origin'

GENEVA: The World Health Organization reiterated Friday that the new coronavirus was of natural origin after US President Donald Trump claimed he had seen evidence it originated in a Chinese lab. Scientists believe the killer virus jumped from animals to humans, emerging in China late last year, possibly from a market in Wuhan selling exotic animals for meat.

Trump claimed Thursday that he had seen proof that the Wuhan Institute of Virology was actually the source of the outbreak, although he refused to give details. Asked about Trump's claim during a virtual press conference, WHO emergency chief Michael Ryan stressed that the UN health agency had "listened again and again to numerous scientists who have looked at the sequences" of the virus.

"We are assured that this virus is natural in origin," he said, reiterating a stance the UN agency has expressed previously. The WHO said earlier Friday that it wanted to be invited to take part in Chinese investigations into the animal origins of the pandemic, which in a matter of months has killed more than 230,000 people worldwide. "What is important is that we establish what that natural host for this virus is," Ryan said, stressing the need to understand "how the animal-human species barrier was breached."

"And the purpose of understanding that is that we can put in place the necessary prevention and public health measures to prevent that happening again anywhere," he said. WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus meanwhile continued Friday to push back against criticism lobbed at his organization, by Trump in particular, who suspended Washington's funding after accusing the UN agency of downplaying the seriousness of the outbreak and kowtowing to China.



TAEZ: An employee, wearing his personal protective equipment (PPE), looks through a microscope at the newly-inaugurated laboratory for coronavirus testing in Yemen's third city of Taiz. — AFP

WHO 'didn't waste time'

Tedros said the WHO had sounded the highest level of alert by declaring that the COVID-19 outbreak constituted a "public health emergency of international concern" on January 30, when there were no deaths and only 82 cases registered outside China. "We didn't waste any time," he told Friday's briefing. "The world had enough time to intervene."

His comments came after WHO's emergency committee met for the first time since making its declaration three months ago. "Of course, the pandemic remains a public health emergency of international concern," Tedros said after receiving the recommendations from the committee, made up of 19 independent experts. While maintaining the global alert level, the experts made a range of general recommendations on how the WHO and countries should adjust their response to the pandemic. — AFP



WUHAN: People visit Yellow Crane Tower after it reopened to the public in Wuhan in China's central Hubei province. — AFP

International

Joe Biden says alleged sex assault 'never happened'

US presidential candidate breaks a month of silence

WASHINGTON: US presidential candidate Joe Biden on Friday emphatically denied sexually assaulting a former aide, saying the alleged incident 27 years ago "never happened." The former vice president thus broke a month of silence on the most potentially damaging claims he has confronted since launching his White House bid a year ago. Republicans have tried to use them to damage his prospects against President Donald Trump in November's election.

"They aren't true. This never happened," Biden said in a statement addressing the accusations made by Tara Reade, a former staffer in his Senate office. The campaign of the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee had forcefully denied the allegations, but Biden himself had yet to address them publicly until now. Biden, 77, said Reade's then-supervisor and former senior staffers in his office "have said, unequivocally, that she never came to them and complained or raised issues."

Reade said on a podcast in March that then-senator Biden sexually assaulted her in a Capitol Hill corridor in 1993, when she was 29. Reade, now 56, alleged that Biden pinned her against a wall when she brought him a gym bag, put his hands "down my skirt" and violated her. Reade's public account evolved over time. In early 2019, when Biden was preparing his presidential bid, she was among multiple women who accused Biden of touching them inappropriately, or in ways that made them feel uncomfortable.

She has since presented a more serious claim of assault to media outlets, and filed an incident report with the Washington police in early April in which

she did not name Biden. Biden went on a morning news show to publicly refute the claims. "It is not true. I'm saying unequivocally it never, never happened, and it didn't," Biden told MSNBC. "I don't know why after 27 years all of this gets raised," Biden added. "But I'm not going to question her motive. I'm not going to attack her."

But he stressed that "I have a right to say, look at the facts. Check it out." Trump, who faces Biden in a presidential election that has been turned on its head by the coronavirus pandemic, himself faced more than a dozen accusations of sexual harassment and assault before he became president. He came out Friday on the side of Biden, telling a right-wing radio host: "I would just say to Joe Biden: Just go out and fight it. It's, you know, it's one of those things." "I've been a total victim of this nonsense false accusations," he said.

'Nothing' to hide

Reade has not produced a copy of the complaint that she allegedly filed in 1993. Biden, calling for transparency, said he has asked officials to search the National Archives, where he says any such document would now be stored. "There's nothing for me to hide," he said. But Biden resisted the idea of calling for a search among his Senate papers.

Those documents "do not contain personnel files," he said. During a Friday evening virtual fundraiser, Biden told donors he was heartened that journalists were investigating the matter: "It isn't enough just to simply take my word for it and to dismiss it out of hand. Frankly, that shouldn't be enough for anyone." Biden, who has pledged to pick



PHILADELPHIA: Former US Vice President Joe Biden speaks during the kick off of his presidential election campaign in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Biden has emphatically denied sexually assaulting a former staffer, saying the incident she claims occurred in 1993 'never happened'. — AFP

a woman to be his vice president, stressed that he has always worked to improve conditions for women, including authoring the Violence Against Women Act.

He was also asked by MSNBC about comments he made during the 2018 Supreme Court confirma-

tion process for Brett Kavanaugh, who had been accused of sexual assault. Biden said at the time that when a woman comes forward with such accusations, "you've got to start off with the presumption that at least the essence of what she's talking about is real." —AFP

News in brief

Missing journalist found dead

STOCKHOLM: A Pakistan journalist living in exile in Sweden who has been missing since March has been found dead, police said Friday. "His body was found on April 23 in the Fyris river outside Uppsala," police spokesman Jonas Eronen said. Sajid Hussain, from the troubled southwestern province of Baluchistan, was working part-time as a professor in Uppsala, about 60 kilometers north of Stockholm, when he went missing on March 2. He was also the chief editor of the Baluchistan Times, an online magazine he had set up, in which he wrote about drug trafficking, forced disappearances and a long-running insurgency. "The autopsy has dispelled some of the suspicion that he was the victim of a crime," Eronen said. The police spokesman added that while a crime could not be completely ruled out, Hussain's death could equally have been the result of an accident or a suicide. — AFP

Qatar's COVID tent collapses

DOHA: Twenty-three staff at a hospital in Qatar were injured when tents being used to boost capacity in response to coronavirus collapsed in a fierce storm, local media reported Friday. Winds of up to 72 kilometers per hour caused two temporary tent annexes at Hazm Mebareek General Hospital in Qatar's Industrial Area to collapse on Thursday, the Gulf Times reported. No patients were hurt and most injuries to staff at the facility, 20 kilometers southwest of central Doha, were minor, the daily added, citing the health ministry. During the gale-force winds on Thursday, a Qatar Airways Boeing 787 on the ground was blown into a nearby Airbus A350 at Doha's Hamad airport causing minor damage but no injuries, the airline said in a statement. — AFP

Venezuela prison riot kills 17

CARACAS: At least 17 inmates were killed Friday in a Venezuelan prison riot, military authorities said. Detainees at Guanare city's Los Llanos prison staged "a disturbance of public order... resulting in 17 deaths and nine injuries," according to a military report. The army gave no reason for the riot, stating inmates had attacked prison officials. Among those wounded were the prison's director, hurt in the back, and a lieutenant injured by shrapnel from a grenade. "The prisoners are upset that they are not allowed visits and they do not have water or food," Carolina Giron of the Venezuelan Prison Observatory (OVP) said. Visitors - who often provide food and medicine to inmates - have been banned since March 16 under coronavirus quarantine measures. — AFP

Egypt army kills 2 jihadists

CAIRO: The Egyptian army killed two suspected jihadists Friday in restive North Sinai, a day after a blast targeted an armored vehicle, a military spokesman said. Army spokesman Tamer Al-Rifai said the suspects died in an exchange of fire in a farming area of the region in eastern Egypt, and that arms, ammunition and walkie-talkies were seized. Egypt's army said Thursday that 10 soldiers, including an officer, were killed or wounded in an explosion that day targeting an armored vehicle near Bir Al-Abed in North Sinai. It gave no further details Friday on the army's casualties. The Islamic State group (IS) claimed responsibility for the attack, according to a statement posted by its propaganda unit, Amaq News Agency. Egypt's President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi extended his condolences to the victims on Twitter. — AFP

President's 'So what' sparks fury in Brazil

RIO DE JANEIRO: Rarely have two words ignited such a firestorm of controversy. "So what?" said Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro on Tuesday when a journalist asked him about the fact that more than 5,000 Brazilians had died of the coronavirus. The far-right leader's off-the-cuff comment has been sparking anger ever since, with governors, politicians, healthcare professionals and media figures all weighing in to express their outrage at his lack of empathy. Bolsonaro is no stranger to controversy.

But his latest remark sparked such a fury because Brazil is facing a seemingly uncontrollable outbreak of the disease and is still several weeks away from the peak of the pandemic, with a death toll that threatens to surpass even the most dire predictions. There have been more than 91,000 officially confirmed cases so far but scientists warn the real figure could be 15 to 20 times higher.

With a death toll that has already topped 6,300, the giant South American country is facing as grim a scenario as Italy or the United States. "So what? I'm sorry. What do you want me to do?" Bolsonaro said Tuesday when questioned about his country passing the 5,000-death mark, more than China. He

Maya villages spurn deportees from US

QUETZALTENANGO, Guatemala: Guatemala's indigenous Maya towns are spurning returned migrants, threatening some with burning their homes or lynching as fear spreads about more than 100 deportees from the United States who tested positive for the new coronavirus. In one city in the Guatemalan highlands, home to a large indigenous population, residents tried to burn down a migrant shelter. In some villages, locals are rebuffing the recently returned and threatening relatives of the deportees with expulsion from their homes.

To date, Guatemalan health officials have said that nearly one fifth of the 585 confirmed cases of coronavirus in the Central American country can be traced to people deported from the United States, most of them on two flights in a single day. That has fueled an angry backlash against migrants as they make their way home.

Carlos Cumes, an 19-year-old whose American dream ended a few weeks ago with his deportation, saw his luck sour again when he returned to the village of Santa Catarina Palopo, hoping to reunite with his family. The village, on the shore of the volcanic Lake Atitlan, is a center for the Kaqchikel Maya whose women wear traditional blue and purple dress.

Walking the final leg to his parents' home, Cumes was confronted by an angry group of locals who had seen televised footage of him being transported toward the village in an ambulance earlier in the day. He was showered with insults and accused of bringing the disease with him, despite having undergone four days of medical observations in the capital and carrying a document from the health ministry pronouncing him symptom-free of coronavirus.

But none of that allayed the mob's worst fears. "They threatened to set my family on fire," said Cumes. "I was really afraid and I could only think about leaving the village so that I wouldn't cause any more trouble." "If I had stayed, they would have burnt my house down and who knows what else," Cumes said in a telephone interview from Guatemala City, where he is observing a mandatory 15-day period of isolation.

Some of his own relatives, he said, also turned their back on him. Biting poverty has made Guatemala one of the main sources of migrants to



BRASILIA: Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro coughs as he speaks after joining his supporters who were taking part in a motorcade to protest against quarantine and social distancing measures to combat the new coronavirus outbreak in Brasilia. — AFP

joked that even though his middle name is Messiah, or Messiah, "I don't do miracles."

Wilson Witzel, the governor of Rio de Janeiro state, called the president's remarks "absolutely unacceptable." With his own state on the verge of a public health meltdown, Witzel slammed the president for "being ironic about the deaths" rather than "being a leader at such a moment." "Do your job," he said on Twitter Wednesday, the day when the pro-gun president was training at a target range, far



GUATEMALA CITY: A vendor shows a coronavirus-shaped pinata on Friday amid the COVID-19 pandemic. — AFP

the United States in recent years, along with neighboring El Salvador and Honduras. The confirmation by President Alejandro Giammattei that 103 Guatemalans deported from the United States on three flights since late March have tested positive for the virus has fostered popular anxiety and the volatile mood in the impoverished highlands, home to many migrants.

Until recently Guatemalans looked favorably on migrants, due in part to the vital remittances they provide to many families, fear of them has grown dramatically in just a short time. "Only a few months ago, most people were very happy (with migrants) because they came bringing remittance checks, but now they treat them like criminals," Giammattei said in a national broadcast on April 19.

Mob justice is not uncommon in the mostly indigenous region and although Guatemala suspended most flights from the United States in mid-April in response to the infections, deportations from Mexico continue apace, stoking residents' fears. The US Immigration and Enforcement Agency (ICE) has said deportees were screened before the flights for elevated temperatures and symptoms associated with COVID-19, the disease caused by the new coronavirus. Yet migrants returned by the United States to Colombia, Mexico, Haiti and Jamaica have also tested positive for the virus in recent weeks, raising broader concerns over the deportation program.

Following reports of infected deportees, the agency said it would acquire 2,000 coronavirus tests per month to screen migrants on outgoing flights, even though it likely would not have enough tests for all deportees. — Reuters

from the woes of Brazil's 210 million citizens. Joao Doria, governor of Sao Paulo state which is also on the frontlines of the battle against the coronavirus with more than 2,500 deaths already, replied furiously to Bolsonaro in the capital Brasilia. "Get out of your Brasilia bubble," he retorted, urging Bolsonaro to visit hospitals "in this country which is crying for its dead and infected." Unlike many other heads of state, the Brazilian leader has not been seen in any hospitals nor has he expressed much solidarity with victims of the disease, bereaved families or healthcare staff who have condemned the lack of ventilators or beds.

The head of the doctors' union in Sao Paulo, Eder Gatti, called on television for "a more serious attitude from the president of the republic." Bolsonaro "shows very little sensitivity to the tragedies that the families of those directly affected by the pandemic are going through," said Lucio Renno, director of the Institute of Political Science at Brasilia University. "His style is the iron fist, to be hard rather than to show solidarity or empathy," he said. It is a style that inevitably draws comparison with Bolsonaro's own role model, US President Donald Trump. That type of reaction is "shocking for a large part of the population" and "reinforces the idea for a good part of the elites and for the Brazilian people that he is not fit to govern," Renno said. Miriam Leitao, an op-ed writer at the daily O Globo, wrote on Thursday that with his "So what?" Bolsonaro had "renounced the presidency." — AFP

Canada PM bans assault weapons

OTTAWA: Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Friday announced an immediate ban on military-grade assault weapons in response to the country's deadliest-ever mass shooting, a rampage that left 22 people dead last month. "These weapons were designed for one purpose, and one purpose only: to kill the largest number of people in the shortest amount of time," Trudeau told a news briefing.

He said his government has approved a decree banning the sale, purchase, use, transport and import of 1,500 models of military-grade assault weapons and their variants. "There is no use, and no place for such weapons in Canada," Trudeau said. The killing spree began on the night of April 18 in Nova Scotia and led to a 13-hour manhunt for the shooter, who was eventually shot dead by police.

Authorities have said the assailant - identified as 51-year-old dentist Gabriel Wortman - was wearing a police uniform, driving a mock police car, and had several guns with him including at least one assault-style weapon. "For many families, including indigenous people, firearms are part of traditions passed down through generations, and the vast majority of gun owners use them safely, responsibly, and in accordance with the law, whether it be for work, sports shooting, for collecting or for hunting," Trudeau said.

"But you don't need an AR-15 to bring down a deer," he added. Mass shootings are less common in Canada than in the United States "but the heartbreaking truth is, they're happening more often than they once did," the prime minister said. "Events like the recent tragedy in Nova Scotia, the attack in 2017 at the Centre Culturel Islamique de Quebec and the massacre that took place in 1989 at Ecole Polytechnique de Montreal should never have happened," he continued.

On January 29, 2017, a man known for his far-right, nationalist sympathies opened fire on worshippers praying at the Quebec City mosque, killing six people and seriously injuring several others. And on December 6, 1989, a 25-year-old man claiming to be an "anti-feminist" burst into classrooms at Montreal's Ecole Polytechnique armed with a gun and a knife and shot exclusively at women, killing 13 female students and a secretary. — AFP

International

India makes tracing app mandatory for workers

India extends lockdown for 2 weeks, eases restrictions

NEW DELHI: India has mandated that all public and private sector employees use a government-backed Bluetooth tracing app and maintain social distancing in offices as New Delhi begins easing some of its lockdown measures in lower-risk areas. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government said India - the country with the largest number of people in lockdown - would extend its nationwide control measures for another two weeks from Monday to battle the spread of the coronavirus that causes the COVID-19 illness, but allow "considerable relaxations" in lower-risk districts.

As part of its efforts to fight the deadly virus, India last month launched the app Aarogya Setu - meaning Health Bridge - a Bluetooth and GPS-based system developed by the country's National Informatics Centre. The app alerts users who may have come in contact with people later found to be positive for COVID-19 or deemed to be at high risk. "Use of Aarogya Setu shall be made mandatory for all employees, both private and public," India's Ministry of Home Affairs said in a notification late on Friday.

It will the responsibility of the heads of companies and organizations "to ensure 100% coverage of this app among the employees," the ministry said. Officials at India's technology ministry and a lawyer who framed the privacy policy for Aarogya Setu told Reuters the app needs to be on at least 200

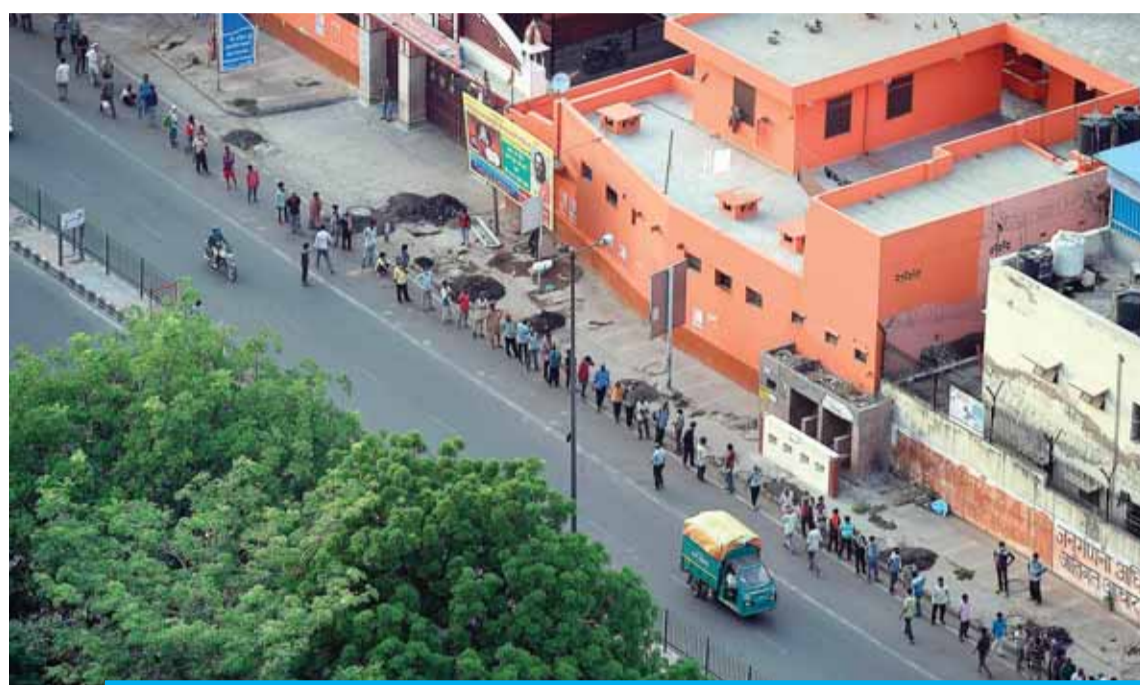
million phones for it to be effective in the country of 1.3 billion people. The app has been downloaded around 50 million times on Android phones, which dominate India's smartphone user base of 500 million, according to Google Play Store data.

The app's compulsory use is raising concerns among privacy advocates, who say it is unclear how the data will be used and who stress that India lacks privacy laws to govern the app. "Such a move should be backed by a dedicated law which provides strong data protection cover and is under the oversight of an independent body," said

App tracing sparks concerns over privacy

Udbhav Tiwari, Public Policy Advisor for internet company Mozilla. New Delhi has said the app will not infringe on privacy as all data is collected anonymously.

The app can help authorities identify virus hotspots and better-target health efforts, the tech ministry told Reuters in late April, adding that information on the app is used "only for administering necessary medical interventions". On Friday, the government said that offices re-opening will also have to implement measures like gaps between shifts and staggered lunch breaks to contain spread of the coronavirus that has infected 3.3 million worldwide and caused more than 230,000 deaths. India has reported over 37,000 cases and



NEW DELHI: Homeless people stand in queue to get food during a government-imposed nationwide lockdown as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 coronavirus in New Delhi. — AFP

1,218 deaths from the virus. The world's biggest coronavirus lockdown will be extended for two weeks beyond May 4, the Indian government said Friday but with some easing of restrictions-including for alcohol. The lockdown imposed near the end of March has caused misery for millions of

workers in India's vast informal sector and dealt a major blow to Asia's third-biggest economy. The home ministry said in a statement that in view of "significant gains in the COVID-19 situation", areas with few or no cases would see "considerable relaxations". — Agencies

Virus-hit Iran holds drive-in religious ceremonies

TEHRAN: With mosques in Iran closed as it battles the coronavirus, worshippers have adopted the novel solution of getting behind the wheel at drive-ins to gather during the fasting month of Ramadan. Gatherings have been banned as part of Iran's efforts to eliminate COVID-19, the disease that has claimed the lives of more than 6,000 people in the Islamic republic.

Deprived of the opportunity to pray at mosques following iftar, the meal breaking the Ramadan fast, families are jumping into their cars to attend drive-in religious ceremonies. The novelty of drive-ins, or watching movies from the comfort of one's own car, is an American cultural phenomenon that never really took off in Iran.

But at a car park in Tehran on Thursday night, more than 100 cars were assembled in front of a giant screen to follow a religious ceremony. "During this quarantine with mosques closed, we really missed (religious) ceremonies," said Fatemeh, a chador-clad woman sitting in one of the cars with her family. "When I read on Instagram that this had been set up, I found it to be really creative and beautiful," said the 28-year-old public servant.

Attendees guided cars towards designated spots facing a giant, retrofitted screen at Eram Amusement Park in the west of the capital. Called the "Nights of Longing", the ceremony started with a music video showing the funeral of top Iranian general Qasem Soleimani, who was killed in a US drone strike in neighboring Iraq in January. In front of the rows of cars, men with loose-fitting surgical masks stood on a stage singing Shiite chants, their image projected onto the screen behind them.

Young families sat inside the cars, their faces glowing in the dark from the bright screen. The orange indicator lights of the cars flashed on and off as children peeked out of sunroofs to get a better view. The coronavirus outbreak has killed 6,091 people and infected 95,646 since Iran announced its first cases on February 19. Those were the deaths of two people in the Shiite shrine city of Qom, a centre for Islamic studies and pilgrims from across the region.

It was not until mid-March that mosques were closed and Friday prayers suspended in a bid to stop the spread of the virus. For the worshippers, the drive-in was an opportunity to get back to the normal way of things without disregarding social distancing.

"I believe this creative solution is a real example of crisis management, and a beautiful one," said Mohammad, a teacher attending with his wife and son. "With many deprived of what they wished for and dreamt of, (the organisers) made it possible for them to be here," he said. — AFP

Why North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's health matters

SEOUL: Nearly three weeks after North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's no-show at a key event sparked rumors he was seriously ill or even dead, state media published photos Saturday showing him in public. Kim's conspicuous absence from the April 15 celebrations for the birthday of his grandfather, the North's founder, sparked feverish speculation over his health and who would replace him at the helm of the nuclear-armed country.

It is not the first time Kim has disappeared from public view. In 2014, he dropped out of sight for nearly six weeks before reappearing with a cane. Days later, South Korea's spy agency said he had undergone surgery to remove a cyst from his ankle. Here is a look at why Kim's health has been the subject of so much conjecture.

Who is his successor?

Kim has been in power for nearly a decade and his death would have left Pyongyang facing an unplanned succession for the first time in its history. Leadership has always been a family affair in the isolated North, dominated by the members of the "Paektu bloodline"-a Northern term for the country's founder Kim Il Sung and his descendants. Kim's three known children are still very young and there is no designated successor as far as the world is aware. His younger sister Yo Jong-one of his closest advisers-is widely regarded as the top contender to succeed him but the North is a highly patriarchal society where seniority and gender both carry weight.

What happens to nuclear talks?

Kim is known in the North as the Supreme Leader

Taliban steps up attacks on Afghan forces since deal

KABUL: The Taliban have mounted more than 4,500 attacks in Afghanistan, marking a sharp escalation in violence, in the 45 days since signing a deal with the United States that paves the way for a US troop drawdown, according to data seen by Reuters. Two sets of data, one from a Western military source and one from an independent body, both show attacks by the hardline Islamist group up by more than 70 percent between March 1 and April 15 compared with the same period a year ago.

Separately, Afghan government data indicates that more than 900 Afghan local and national forces were killed during that same period, up from about 520 a year earlier. Meanwhile, Taliban casualties fell to 610 in the period, down from roughly 1,660 a year ago, as US and Afghan forces have reduced the number of offensive attacks and air strikes following the US-Taliban accord. Senior Western, Afghan and independent officials tracking the ground situation say that the increase in attacks shows the insurgent group's wilful disregard of a pledge to reduce violence made as part of the accord signed in late February.

The violence in the war-damaged nation has coincided with the rapid spread of the coronavirus infection. In Washington, Pentagon spokesman Jonathan Hoffman told reporters that while the Taliban have adhered to a commitment in the Feb. 29 deal not to mount attacks on US-led coalition forces or major cities, the militants' level of violence "is unacceptably high" and "not conducive to a diplomatic solution." "We have continued to do



MEXICO CITY: Health workers of the La Raza Hospital demonstrate for the lack of medical material to care for COVID-19 patients, in Mexico City during the novel coronavirus pandemic. — AFP

and his authority spans the ruling Workers' Party and the military. All major decisions require his approval. Kim's disappearance from public view came as Pyongyang's talks with Washington over the North's nuclear arsenal are at a standstill, despite three meetings between Kim and US President Donald Trump. If Kim were incapacitated or dead, it would have increased uncertainty over the process. Analysts also say it could have led to a chaotic power struggle and triggered an exodus of refugees into China-something the North's diplomatic backer and main trading partner Beijing has long feared. "Kim's personal profile, family history, and the structure of the North Korean regime make his health a major variable for the country's stability and foreign policy," Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul said.

North Korea is an unusually opaque country, where even economic growth figures are treated as a state secret. Observers and even diplomats in Pyongyang rely heavily on the closely controlled state media for hints of what is going on. Secrecy is strictest of all around the leadership and the absence of information creates ample room for speculation to flourish unchecked. Kim was last seen presiding over a ruling party meeting on April 11. But four days later he missed the celebrations for the birthday of his grandfather-the most important date in the North's political calendar-sparking questions over his whereabouts. Daily NK, a South Korea-based outlet run mostly by North Korean defectors, reported Kim had undergone a cardiovascular procedure and was recovering at a villa in North Pyongan province. — AFP



KANDAHAR: Muslims offer Taraweeh evening prayers during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan at a mosque in Kandahar city. The Taliban has dismissed a government call for a Ramadan ceasefire in Afghanistan, saying a truce is 'not rational' as they ramp up attacks on government forces. — AFP

defensive attacks to help defend our partners in the area and we will continue to do that," Hoffman added. The four provinces that have reported the highest number of cases of the infection have also been the ones hit the most by Taliban violence in recent weeks, according to the two data sets and at least three senior Afghan and Western officials.

As of May 1, Afghanistan has reported over 2,335 coronavirus cases and 68 deaths, but international observers believe numbers could be much higher, given the lack of testing. "Taliban fighters are not hitting large government centers or cities, they are focusing on villages in Herat, Kabul, Kandahar and Balkh provinces that have reported the highest number of coronavirus cases," a senior Western security official said on condition of anonymity.

Western security officials, diplomats and international observers said the Taliban's strategy to slowly erode government control of rural areas and then position themselves to besiege cities during the pandemic could derail the peace deal. —AFP

Blood pressure medicines 'don't raise COVID risk'

WASHINGTON: Commonly used blood pressure medicines do not heighten susceptibility to COVID-19 infection, or increase the risk of becoming seriously ill with the disease, three major studies said Friday, positive news for the millions of people who take them. The research primarily concerned angiotensin-converting-enzyme (ACE) inhibitors and angiotensin-receptor blockers (ARBs), which are also given to diabetes patients to help protect their kidneys. ACE inhibitors include the likes of ramipril, lisinopril and other drugs ending in -pril; while ARBs include valsartan and losartan, and generally end in -sartan.

There had been concern arising from animal studies that these medicines might increase the body's levels of a protein called ACE2, which the coronavirus latches on to when it invades human cells, thus increasing people's vulnerability to the disease. Confusing matters further, there were also contradictory animal studies that showed having more ACE2 proteins might lessen an inflammatory reaction in lungs to COVID-19, a beneficial effect.

The three new studies were published in the New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM). Each involved reviewing the records of thousands of people either on or not on the medicines and seeing if they got infected and how the disease progressed. They then used statistical methods to control for other factors like underlying health conditions that might make people more susceptible to infection and to serious COVID-19. — AFP

Business

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10 Lebanon banks reject rescue plan, govt seeks IMF help



11 Alghanim hails Amir's guidance and Cabinet's measures in addressing COVID-19 challenges



NEW YORK: Industrial firms' employees manufacture Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), like face shields, to supply New York's healthcare workers and hospitals at the Brooklyn Navy Yard. The coronavirus pandemic caused manufacturing activity in the US to post a historic decline in April, according to an industry survey yesterday and it may stay depressed for some time. —AFP

US manufacturing activity plunges

New orders, employment measures tumble to 11-year low

WASHINGTON: US manufacturing activity plunged to an 11-year low in April as the novel coronavirus wreaked havoc on supply chains, suggesting the economy was sinking deeper into recession. The survey from the Institute for Supply Management (ISM) on Friday added to a raft of grim data this week, including a collapse in consumer spending in March and a surge to 30.3 million in the number of Americans who have filed claims for unemployment benefits in the last six weeks.

Strict measures to slow the spread of COVID-19, the respiratory illness caused by the coronavirus, have almost paralyzed the country, leading to the deepest economic contraction since the Great Recession in the first quarter. "The backdrop for manufacturers is very bleak, with collapsing global demand, ongoing supply chain disruptions, and high levels of uncertainty all posing very significant challenges," said Oren Klachkin, lead US economist at Oxford Economics in New York. "We do not expect output losses to be recouped until 2021."

The ISM said its index of national factory activity dropped to a reading of 41.5 last month, the lowest level since April 2009, from 49.1 in March. The monthly decline in the ISM index was the biggest since October 2008. A reading below 50 indicates contraction in the manufacturing sector, which accounts for 11 percent of the US economy.

Economists polled by Reuters had forecast the index would fall to 36.9 in April. The smaller-than-expected drop in the ISM index was attributable to a surge in the survey's

measure of supplier deliveries to a reading of 76.0 last month from 65.0 in March.

A lengthening in suppliers' delivery times is normally associated with a strong economy and increased customer demand, which would be a positive contribution. But in this case slower supplier deliveries indicate supply shortages related to the coronavirus pandemic, and not stronger demand. Even with some parts of the country starting to reopen, economists do not expect a rapid reversal in the economic downturn, with some small businesses expected to go under. There is also a risk of a second wave of COVID-19 infections. Stocks on Wall Street were trading lower amid the rising tide of weak economic reports and President Donald Trump's threats to slap new tariffs on China over the coronavirus crisis. The dollar was slightly lower against a basket of currencies, while US Treasury prices fell.

Recession territory

Last month's decrease in the ISM index pulled it below the 42.8 threshold. A reading above this level over a long period of time is associated with economic expansion.



Construction spending increases

MUFJ in New York.

The ISM said comments from manufacturers were "strongly negative regarding the near-term outlook, with sentiment clearly impacted by the coronavirus pandemic and continuing energy market recession." COVID-19 lockdowns have weighed on demand for oil, sending crude prices crashing. The ISM's forward-looking new orders sub-index tumbled to a reading of 27.1 in April, the lowest

since December 2008, from 42.2 in March. The monthly decline was the largest since April 1951. Out of the 18 industries, only manufacturers of paper and food, beverage and tobacco products reported increases in orders. This is consistent with shortages of some foodstuffs and paper products like toilet paper.

The survey's measure of order backlogs at factories plummeted to 37.8 last month from 45.9 in March. With orders collapsing, manufacturers slashed payrolls last month. The ISM's factory employment index plunged to a reading of 27.5 last month, the lowest since February 1949, from 43.8 in March. The monthly decrease in the employment measure was the largest since the ISM started tracking the series in 1948. This fits in with economists' expectations that the government's closely watched employment report next Friday will show a record more than 20 million people lost their jobs in April, with the unemployment rate blowing past the post-World War Two record of 10.8 percent touched in November 1982.

In March the jobless rate shot up 0.9 percentage point, the largest monthly change since January 1975, to 4.4 percent. A separate report from the Commerce Department on Friday showed construction spending rebounded 0.9 percent in March, with gains in private and public outlays, after declining 2.5 percent in February. The report, however, likely does not fully capture the coronavirus-related business closures and disruptions that swept through the country beginning in mid-March. —Reuters

Greece on verge of virus recession

ATHENS: Ten years after sinking into its worst economic crisis in living memory, Greece once again faces the specter of a grave recession in the midst of a global coronavirus lockdown. Though the country has so far spared the death toll of other European nations at fewer than 150 fatalities from COVID-19, it will not escape the resulting economic downturn. Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis warned this week. "The consequences of this coronavirus attack will undoubtedly be dramatic," he told parliament on Thursday.

"We know with certainty that (the recession) will be deep... we don't know how long the health crisis will last, we don't yet know if we'll have tourism." Tourism is one of Greece's most important sources of revenue, along with shipping. The Greek state alone could lose 8-10 billion euros (\$8.8-11 billion) in income this year, the prime minister said.

Where's the money?

Greece has already adopted measures worth 17.5 billion euros, or 10 percent of national output, to support businesses and employees. Mitsotakis said. Including EU funds, the package will reach 24 billion euros, he said. But the opposition has questioned

whether the money has actually reached the intended recipients. "Where is this money? It's good for announcements but actual businesses and (employees) have not received a single euro," former leftist prime minister Alexis Tsipras said Thursday, predicting that layoffs will soon be "out of control." Greece this year had been counting on a growth spurt of 2.4 percent. After exiting the final debt crisis bailout in 2018, its borrowing rates were at historic lows—in October Athens even sold treasury bills at a negative rate—and it has cash reserves of more than 36 billion euros at hand.

But with most of its economy in virus quarantine since March and global lockdowns expected to wreak havoc on tourism, Greece is expected to sink into a 10 percent recession this year, according to the International Monetary Fund.

'Irreparable' damage

Panagiotis Petrakis, professor of finance at the University of Athens, argued that the economic blow will be less severe. "The most likely scenario is a six percent contraction, provided there is no deterioration in the pandemic," he told AFP.

Petrakis also believes that the economic impact of this crisis will be less protracted. The IMF itself estimates a 5.5 percent Greek recovery in 2021. The Greek finance ministry says the downturn could be limited to 4.7 percent through support measures, followed by a 5.1 percent rebound. The jobless rate will

approach 20 percent, it said Friday. The government will begin easing lockdown restrictions this month, with most shops opening by May 11 and restaurants and year-round hotels following on June 1.

But few expect any foreign visitors before July. Many Greek businesses fear the damage will be irreparable, especially with minimum two-metre (6.5-foot) social distancing requirements squeezing out customers. "Last summer I had 10 tables outside and 10 inside. Now, I will just have three tables outside and I'm supposed to make do," says Costas Gogos, owner of a tavern in the port of Rafina near Athens. "Many will not even reopen, they won't manage with so few tables," added a neighbouring restaurant owner.

Memories of 2010

It was on May 2, 2010, when the socialist government of George Papandreou signed the first of three eventual bailouts with the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the IMF that would total 350 billion euros. A week earlier, Papandreou had stunned the nation by announcing the call for international assistance. His televised address from the tiny island of Kastelorizo is indelibly etched in the nation's collective memory. In the years that followed, a quarter of Greek national output would be wiped out in wave upon wave of wage and pension cuts and tax hikes demanded by the so-called troika of creditors. Unemployment soared to a high of 27 percent before



ATHENS: Though Greece has so far been spared the death toll of other European nations at fewer than 150 fatalities from COVID-19, it will not escape the resulting economic downturn, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis warned this week. —AFP

eventually falling to 16 percent in March, still the highest in the eurozone.

Dozens of general strikes and hundreds of street protests would follow, many of them violent. In one of the worst incidents on May 5, 2010, three people died in a bank set on fire during an anti-austerity protest, one of them a pregnant woman. The culprits were never caught. The crisis was sparked by reckless state spending and misreporting of fiscal data to the EU. When revealed by Papandreou's government, it caused Greece's borrowing rates to spike beyond reach. —AFP

Business

Poor stay poor, rich get richer? Virus aid weighs on EU market competition

Big differences in how much EU states can spend on COVID rescue

BRUSSELS/MADRID: Germany accounts for more than half of the emergency coronavirus state aid approved by the EU executive, prompting concerns that countries with the deepest pockets might be getting an unfair advantage in the bloc's single market.

Ensuring a competitive level playing field within its cherished single market of some 450 million people is a central EU tenet and has long been a key condition for opening up to foreign players from China to, more recently, Brexit Britain. But the executive European Commission suspended the normally-strict state aid restrictions in mid-March, allowing the 27 EU states to pump cash into their economies and companies battered by coronavirus, with more than 1.9 trillion euros (\$2.1 trillion) worth of national schemes approved so far. It is not an even game, however, as richer or less indebted states have more scope to channel funds. While Germany makes up for about a quarter of the EU's GDP, it accounts for some 52 percent of the total value of the emergency coronavirus state aid cleared so far, Commission data shows.

France and Italy share joint second place, each with 17 percent of the total, and the Commission plans to maintain its hands-off approach till at least the end of 2020.

"There is clearly a risk of a breakdown of... the internal market in Europe," a senior Spanish government official said. "Not all the countries of the internal market have access to this liquidity. Germany has deep pockets and can afford it."

Germany granted a 3 billion euro government-backed loan to sports retailer Adidas, a 1.8 billion

euro loan commitment to holiday operator TUI and is in talks with Lufthansa on a 9 billion euro rescue package, among others.

"The state aid that some European countries are discussing with airlines risks distorting competition and creating benefits for some when the sector restarts," said Carlo Amati of Italian flight attendants union ANPAV. "The market shares that existed before COVID19 should be defended."

Announcing plans to cut 3,000 jobs on Friday, Ryanair's Chief Executive Michael O'Leary said he would challenge in European courts what he described as more than 30 billion euros in state aid to flag carrier rivals of his Irish budget airline.

Germany gains most from relaxed rules



Inequalities
The Commission's competition chief, Margrethe Vestager said on Wednesday the suspension of usual state aid

rules was "fully legitimate" now to save jobs and businesses and that competition distortions were kept to a minimum. "There are differences in how much member states can spend depending on their fiscal space," she told a virtual debate. "But... we preserve the single market because we really need the single market for our recovery." An EU official, speaking on condition of anonymity, was more frank: "... if you look at the scale of what Germany in particular, but also some others, are doing - any notion of level playing field or single market integrity has gone out of the window."

That underpins the ailing south's demand for joint EU financing to spur a recovery. Otherwise, they fear, not only will they have suffered more severely



BUCHAREST: Romanian harvest workers heading to the UK get out of a bus at the "Henry Coanda" airport in Bucharest on Friday amid the novel coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic. With euro zone preliminary data showing an economic contraction of 3.8 percent in the first quarter of 2020, the EU is considering issuing debt by the Commission to raise more funds to help member states kickstart growth in 2021-22. — AFP

in the health crisis but will also take longer to get their economies back on track. With euro zone preliminary data showing an economic contraction of 3.8 percent in the first quarter of 2020, the EU is considering issuing debt by the Commission to raise more funds to help member states kickstart growth in 2021-22. Guntram Wolff of the Bruegel think-tank said central EU borrowing could allow Brussels to

make demands on how the money is spent after the Commission also came under pressure to attach climate strings to coronavirus state aid packages. "The more decentralised these schemes, the more political considerations kick in - whether and what conditions to put on aid, whether states should take on voting shares, what sectors to help - the bigger the threat to the single market," he said. — Reuters

Oil fund's forced sales send WTI prices plunging

LONDON: Front-month US light crude oil futures prices slumped almost 25 percent yesterday, the second sharp tumble in a week, after the exchange operator ordered a major commodity fund to sell some of its near-dated futures contracts.

United States Oil Fund (USO) announced to investors it would roll its current positions forward over three days between Monday and Wednesday after intervention by the Chicago Mercantile Exchange (CME). USO positions were previously split between contracts for delivery in June (20 percent), July (40 percent), August (20 percent) and September (20 percent), after the fund had already been forced to shift them out of the front-month by recent volatility.

The fund is now shifting its positions even further forward, exiting the June contract altogether, and moving positions to July (30 percent), August (15 percent), September (15 percent), October (15 percent), December (15 percent) and June 2021 (10 percent).

USO announced its positions would be rolled forward between April 27 and April 29, with approximately one-third rolled each day, in a filing with the US Securities Exchange Commission (SEC). In its filing, the fund noted there had been "significant market volatility" as a result of the coronavirus pandemic and the recent oil volume war between Saudi Arabia and Russia. It said positions were being rolled because of market conditions, regulatory requirements and risk-mitigation measures being imposed by the futures commission merchant that handles its trades.

Position changes came after the USO received letters from CME instructing it not to exceed new position and accountability limits for the remaining contract months in the second and third quarters.

"We cannot comment on our specific interaction with any market participant or any particular price move," a spokesperson said in an email to Reuters. "CME Group operates a comprehensive surveillance program - including spot month position limits and accountability levels in order to monitor any concentration concerns - to further ensure our markets function as designed, provide price discovery, and facilitate risk transfer." But position limits seem to have been intended to keep most of USO's very large position in light sweet crude oil futures, also known as West Texas Intermediate (WTI), well away from contract expiry dates.

By ensuring USO's positions remain smaller in the run-up to expiries over the next few months, regulators can minimize the risk it could be forced to sell them abruptly in order to avoid taking delivery, distorting market prices. USO was not involved in the sudden plunge in WTI prices in the May contract on April 20, a day before it expired, because the fund had already rolled its positions forward several days earlier. But regulators seem keen to ensure USO's large and well known positions do not become a cause of dislocations in future ("United States Oil Fund LP Form 8-K", SEC, April 27). Ironically, the intervention, however well intentioned, has increased volatility in the short term, even if it could lessen volatility later on. — Reuters

Oil producers need to rebalance market

By Dan Colover

It is no secret that the coronavirus pandemic has wreaked havoc globally, but the industry in the most turmoil now is arguably the oil sector. The global lockdowns have decimated oil demand, particularly for transportation fuels, and especially jet fuel and gasoline, and caused ripple effects across the global economy.

Prices of gasoline, or petrol, at the pump have fallen significantly in many countries but consumption is declining as well. Given various lockdowns and movement restrictions across the world many consumers have changed their daily routines and habits, minimizing driving, curtailing trips both for business and leisure. A quick drive to the shops to buy essential items is often the only time their car is used.

As a result, the fall in pump prices for gasoline is not something that many consumers have been able to take advantage of in the immediate term. S&P Global Platts Analytics estimates that as a result of weaker global GDP and increased lockdowns, global oil demand is forecast to decline by 8.7 million b/d for the year with a contraction of 18.9 million b/d in the second quarter. This is the worst case of demand destruction ever witnessed in modern times.

In response, oil refineries around the world have throttled back their processing volumes to mitigate



this sudden loss in consumption and to preserve positive margins. Global refining capacity is currently around 100 million barrels a day, and shut-ins along with idled capacity reached nearly 20 million b/d in late April, as refiners either lowered operating rates

or halted operations altogether.

With the majority of the global population staying home, the resulting crash in oil demand has caused oil prices to fall nearly 80 percent since the start of the year. Benchmark Platts Dubai crude, which represents the price of a barrel of medium heavy sour crude for loading in the Middle East - arguably the most consumed type of crude in Asia - has tumbled to a low of \$13.55 on April 22, as sellers have struggled to find buyers. Platts Dubai price assessments have averaged \$20.76/b, month to date, in contrast to \$33.70/b in March and \$54.22/b in February.

Other crude oil grades have not been spared. In the North Sea, Platts Dated Brent represents a more prompt loaded barrel of lower density and lower sulfur or light, sweet crude oil and this price has also declined.

In the US, WTI NYMEX crude futures remarkably went negative and settled at a low of minus \$37.63/b on April 20. This reflected limited storage availability in inland parts of the country forcing financial players without access to storage to close

out their financial contracts to avoid taking physical delivery. The pain has been felt most acutely by upstream producers of crude oil, which must now make difficult business decisions as prices are now below break-even levels for many projects. Crude production is not a uniform matter and there are thousands of oil companies around the world, all with different economics. Oil producers of onshore crude oil in the Middle East typically have some of the lowest production costs, but these countries are also highly dependent on oil revenues to fund their national budgets.

Many of these countries have nationalized oil companies and they are able to augment production as they see fit. However what we have seen in recent weeks is that despite the largest agreed production cuts in history between OPEC and its coalition of partners, crude prices remain sharply lower than before the coronavirus outbreak. In contrast, in the US, there is no national oil company and there are a myriad independent producers with their own economics, some of whom will have earlier hedged their oil production at specified oil price levels and therefore could be incentivized to continue production.

S&P Global Platts Analytics believes the OPEC+ production cut of 9.7 million b/d isn't enough to plug the huge near-term imbalance in the marketplace. The world is rapidly running out of storage for crude oil and the price should act as a signal to producers to cut output to rebalance the market, as without demand at the levels seen just a few months ago there are very few benefiting from the current situation. — Dan Colover, Structured Market Engagement, Middle East, S&P Global Platts

Lebanon banks reject economic rescue plan

BEIRUT/LONDON: An economic rescue plan that will form the basis of Lebanon's talks with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was panned by banks on Friday as one that would "further destroy confidence" in the country. The comments, which could hold sway with the IMF given banks are among the largest holders of Lebanon's debt, coincided with Beirut signing a request for assistance from the Fund on Friday in what Prime Minister Hassan Diab described as "a historic moment in the history of Lebanon".

The rescue plan, approved by Diab's government on Thursday, sets out tens of billions of dollars in financial sector losses and tough measures to claw out of a crisis that has seen the currency crash, unemployment soar, Lebanon default on its sovereign debt and street protests. Some economists and diplomats welcomed the plan as a critical first step to recovery, but they were sceptical that ambitious reforms to cut public sector spending and overhaul the banking sector could be enacted after years of feet dragging.

"This means the onset of serious negotiations with the IMF so this is very important and good news because it removes a lot of uncertainty. Having said that, the issue in Lebanon has always been one of execution," former economy minister Nasser Saïdi said of the 53-page plan.

Lebanon's banking association said it could in "no way" endorse a plan it was not consulted on despite being "a key part of any solution". The association called on members of parliament to reject it in part for infringing on private property rights. The plan does not require the parliament to pass it. "As laid out in the Plan, the domestic (bank) restructuring will further destroy confidence in



BEIRUT: Prime Minister Hassan Diab delivering a statement following a governmental meeting at the presidential palace in Baabda, east of the capital Beirut. The Lebanese government approved a long-awaited plan to rescue the debt-saddled economy from its worst crisis in decades, following a fresh wave of angry streets protests. — AFP

Lebanon both domestically and internationally ... (and) is likely to deter investment in the economy thereby hindering any recovery prospects," the association's statement said.

A central plank of the plan rests on covering financial sector losses of roughly \$70 billion in part by a bank shareholder bail-in that would wipe out their capital and cash from large depositors that would be restored later. The banking association called revenue and expenditure measures "vague" and not backed by a precise timeline, and said the plan did not address inflationary pressures that could lead to hyperinflation.

A source close to the banking sector said the IMF was likely to consult the banks on the rescue plan before moving forward. The source said the association was planning to present a plan of its own to the government in one to two weeks. The government is hoping that with an IMF program in hand, foreign donors will release about \$11 billion pledged at a Paris conference in 2018 which was tied to long-stalled reforms. — Reuters

Trump pressed Saudis to cut oil supply: Report

WASHINGTON/LONDON/DUBAI: As the United States pressed Saudi Arabia to end its oil price war with Russia, President Donald Trump gave Saudi leaders an ultimatum. In an April 2 phone call, Trump told Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman that unless the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) started cutting oil production, he would be powerless to stop lawmakers from passing legislation to withdraw US troops from the kingdom, four sources familiar with the matter told Reuters.

The threat to upend a 75-year strategic alliance, which has not been previously reported, was central to the US pressure campaign that led to a landmark global deal to slash oil supply as demand collapsed in the coronavirus pandemic - scoring a diplomatic victory for the White House.

Trump delivered the message to the crown prince 10 days before the announcement of production cuts. The kingdom's de facto leader was so taken aback by the threat that he ordered his aides out of the room so he could continue the discussion in private, according to a US source who was briefed on the discussion by senior administration officials. The effort illustrated Trump's strong desire to protect the US oil industry from a historic price meltdown as governments shut down economies worldwide to fight the virus.

It also reflected a telling reversal of Trump's longstanding criticism of the oil cartel, which he has blasted for raising energy costs for Americans with supply cuts that usually lead to higher gasoline prices. Now, Trump was asking OPEC to slash output. — Reuters

Business

Alghanim hails Amir's guidance and Cabinet's measures in addressing COVID-19 challenges

Markaz holds AGM for fiscal year 2019

KUWAIT: Kuwait Financial Centre "Markaz" held its Annual General Meeting and Extraordinary General Meeting on 28, April, 2020, for the fiscal year ending 31 December, 2019.

Diraar Yusuf Alghanim, Markaz Chairman, inaugurated the meeting, and stated: "Today's meeting coincides with the outbreak of the novel COVID-19 in Kuwait and across the world. I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge and commend the directives and guidance of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and the distinguished cabinet's wisdom and speed of execution, headed by His Highness the PM Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, to face the health and security repercussions of this crisis".



New board of directors elected

Alghanim added: "The novel COVID-19 outbreak has imposed a halt on economic activity and social life, and brought about an unprecedented collapse in oil prices, which resulted in negative repercussions on local and global markets. Countries across the world, including the GCC countries, have taken financial and

legal measures to address the results of the outbreak and its impact on production and social components, reduce the burdens on the workforce and limit the bankruptcies in the local markets."

He said: "As an extension to the economic plan that the Cabinet announced on Thursday March 31, 2020, the Governor of the Central Bank of Kuwait, in his capacity as Chairman of the Higher Steering Committee for Economic Stimulus, presented during the press conference a plan to address the flow of liquidity to economic activity through local banks and to support part of the benefits from Central Bank of Kuwait. Although the vision about the effect of these measures on the local economy in the short or medium term is not yet clearly formed, we at Markaz are closely following these measures and their consequences on the national economy."

"On the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan, we would like to extend our warm wishes, and ask God to bless our beloved country with safety and peace, and relief our homelands and the whole world from this pandemic soon."

Alghanim then moved on to discuss the agenda of the General Assembly, starting with a eulogy for Sheikh Humoud Sabah Al-Sabah, Vice-Chairman, who passed away in November 2019, and who had an effective contribution during his time with the Board of Directors since 2002, may God have mercy on him and bless his family with patience and fortitude. In line with the meeting discussions, the assembly approved all points of the agenda and to the amendments of items 9 and 10 specifically. The assembly unanimously



KUWAIT: Markaz Chairman Diraar Y Alghanim addresses the AGM (center) accompanied by Markaz CEO Manaf A Al-Hajeri and Markaz COO Ali H Khalil.

approved the reduction of cash dividends for shareholders for the year 2019 from 10 percent (10 fils per share) to 5 percent (5 fils per share), based on a proposal submitted by a representative of shareholders who own (16.63 percent) of the company's share capital. In addition, the assembly approved the reduction of the remuneration of the board of directors, based on the recommendation of the Chairman.

The General Assembly also approved the election of the new board of directors, which consists of Diraar Yusuf Alghanim, Faisal AbdulAziz Al-Jallal,

Ayman Abdullatif Alshaya, Fahad Yaqoub Al-Jouan, Adel Mohammed Alghannam, Omran Habib Hayat and Fahad Sulaiman Al Dalali.

The Extraordinary General Assembly was also held, where all points of the agenda were also approved.

Lastly, Alghanim extended his gratitude to the shareholders, attendees and the "Markaz" family, thanking them for their commitment to supporting the company, and wishing the Almighty to free our world from the pandemic soon.

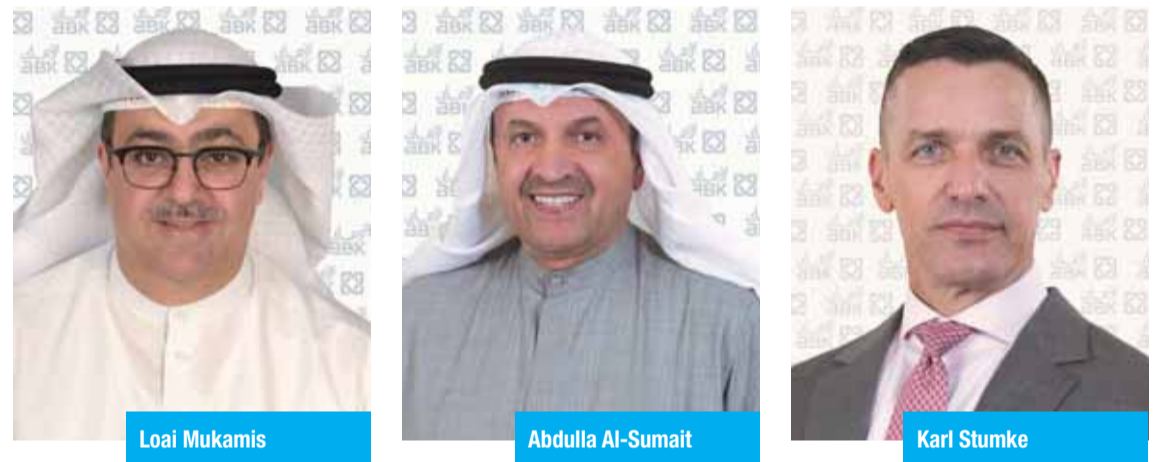
Zyda pledges to build 1,000 web stores

KUWAIT: Zyda, the company that migrates businesses from offline to online in less than 48 hours, yesterday pledged to help migrate 1,000 local Kuwait businesses impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic for free throughout the holy month of Ramadan. The initiative also waives Zyda's subscription fee for the first three months. Zyda has a proven seamless transition process and enables businesses to sell directly and easily across platforms, including Instagram. Zyda's key features include integrations with analytics, logistics and delivery providers, multiple state-of-the-art payment channels, powerful dashboards for managers

to monitor and track performance, and market-leading customer support.

Zyda Co-Founder Hamad Aljudai said, "Zyda was founded on a mission to ease the transition of businesses from offline commerce to online commerce. However, today we feel we have responsibility to help businesses survive, and we are extending our service to any businesses in Kuwait who need to migrate online in order to continue staying in business; and we are offering it for free for the first three months - no strings attached. Our service is tried, tested, and already generates over six million US dollars in turnover for our clients and we welcome any business impacted by the lockdowns, regardless of size."

Zyda Marketing Manager, Bashar Alostad, stated: "Hundreds of businesses already rely on Zyda for their online sales. This initiative aims to aid local retail businesses of any size, ranging from home-based companies to licensed enterprises in Kuwait, KSA, UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, and Oman."



Loai Mukamis

Abdulla Al-Sumait

Karl Stumke

ABK announces appointments

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) yesterday announced the promotion of Abdulla Al-Sumait as Deputy Group Chief Executive Officer, the appointment of Loai Mukamis as Chief Executive Officer for ABK - Kuwait and the promotion of Karl

Stumke as Chief Executive Officer for ABK - UAE, after obtaining the necessary approvals from the Central Bank of Kuwait.

Commenting on these changes, Talal Reza Behbehani, Chairman of ABK said: "I would like to congratulate Abdulla Al-Sumait and Karl Stumke on their new positions. I also take this opportunity on behalf of the Board of Directors, to welcome Loai Mukamis to ABK. With these organizational changes we are well placed to continue our growth strategy, and achieve our long-term strategic objectives."

'INJAZ Beyond Borders' with Citi Foundation

KUWAIT: INJAZ Al-Arab/ JA MENA launched its first virtual Innovation Camp Challenge, INJAZ Beyond Borders, supported by Citi Foundation on April 16th, 2020. INJAZ Beyond Borders Challenge is built around proposing solutions to gaps and weaknesses exposed by the COVID-19 crisis in Education, Healthcare and Technology. The challenge aims to pave the way to how technology can accelerate digital education by reaching more youth across the MENA region.

The challenge received more than 350 applicants from 13 MENA countries. A total of 20 teams and 280 youth participants were selected between the ages of 18 and 24 to take part in the competition on Zoom. INJAZ Beyond Borders falls under JA Worldwide #KeepLearning global initiative that aims to engage 300 students, volunteers, and INJAZ team members in a twist through well-known innovation camps that are complete with business challenges, jury, presentations & awards. INJAZ Beyond Borders was kicked off with a welcoming note from Carmen Haddad, Vice Chair of Citi Middle East and Akef Aqrabawi, CEO of INJAZ Al-Arab who also served on the main judging panel along with Savas Cizmeci from Citi.

Four teams in total won the camp challenge where ED44 - BeYouthers and EDB1 won the Education track and HLC3 - Team Homies and HLD5 - Beyond Differences won the Health track. The Education track tackled challenges on improving the delivery and increasing access of educational content during crises through technological means and providing more flexible integrated systems that allows learning to go uninterrupted. The healthcare track tackled challenges in how to better and rapidly equip the healthcare community in fighting COVID-19 as well as how to facilitate access to COVID-19 medical data for researchers to understand the virus and find ways to protect, treat & manage the disease & its effects.

Commenting on the successful virtual challenge, INJAZ Al-Arab CEO, Akef Aqrabawi said, "INJAZ Beyond Borders proves how ready our youth in the MENA region and well equipped with the tools, skills, and solutions for the global challenges and crises we face. Our #KeepLearning initiative provides these talented teams with a pedestal for their winning tech inspired COVID-19 ideas. They've provided solutions that rely on technology, governmental actions, gamification, partnerships, and customized programs that can elevate the education and healthcare community in times of crises. In partnership with Citi Foundation, this initiative was made possible to reach hundreds of youth in MENA."

Carmen Haddad, Vice Chair of Citi Middle East said, Education, healthcare, and technology are increasing in demand and evolving more than ever during the global COVID-19 pandemic. With the world and the MENA region connected online, it is our youth that can help shape and provide solid solutions in times of sudden challenges and crisis. As the world around us continues to evolve, in response to COVID-19, we at Citi, continue to support our clients, our employees, our community partners and especially the youth in the region.

Citi recently announced that Citi and the Citi Foundation have committed over \$65 million to date in support of COVID-19-related community relief efforts around the world, including nearly \$36 million in charitable contributions from Citi and nearly \$30 million in grants from the Citi Foundation.



The successful online innovation challenge and event brought together volunteers and teams from across the MENA region on Zoom to develop solutions and address and support the education and healthcare systems that could be hindered during the COVID-19 pandemic. INJAZ Beyond Borders proved how technology, knowledge, and the youth can disrupt various sectors and can prepare for future challenges.

INJAZ Al-Arab/JA MENA is the regional operating center of JA worldwide Operating in 14 countries across the Middle East and North Africa. INJAZ Al-Arab is the largest non-profit organization dedicated to overcoming unemployment in the region and aims to inspire a culture of entrepreneurship and business innovation among Arab youth. Partnering with leading companies in the private sector, INJAZ Al-Arab equips Arab youth to drive the economies of the Arab World forward through training designed to inspire them to develop ambition, entrepreneurship and professional skills.

Named one of the top 100 NGOs in the world by Global Journal/NGO Advisor since 2012, INJAZ Al-Arab has influenced the lives of over 3.5 million students since its inception in 2004. INJAZ Al-Arab is a member of Junior Achievement: the world's largest and fastest-growing youth business organization dedicated to educating students about workforce readiness, entrepreneurship and financial literacy through experiential, hands-on programs.

Contactless payments: One tap for a more secure way to pay

By Ankush Devadason

KUWAIT: COVID-19 is challenging all of us globally with an entirely new reality. Many of us are home bound and international borders and public transport systems have been heavily curtailed. People are limiting the amount of time they spend outside and are more sensitive to areas or surfaces that could be exposed to many people.

What has not changed is that people still need to spend on essentials such as groceries, medicines and the like. Merchants also need to serve their customers and communities while protecting both customers and staff. As everyone looks for ways to meet these needs without compromising on physical distancing and hygiene practices, we are seeing an even greater appetite for fast and secure payment systems that reduce the need for physical contact. While eCommerce is a boon for the burgeoning delivery economy, contactless payments offer a welcome solution in the face-to-face environment.

For consumers, contactless payments offer an easy, fast and secure experience especially as smartphones and even smarter contactless enabled wearable devices are now commonplace. For merchants, tap to pay technology speeds up queuing times and reduces the burden of handling cash.

There are now almost 50 countries globally where contactless payments represent at least a third of all face-to-face transactions. In Kuwait, that figure is even greater, where more than 5 out of every 10 transactions are already made using contactless cards or devices.

While we at Visa recognize the popularity and need for contactless payment technology among

consumers and merchants, we want to make it even more accessible.

One of the most significant moves Visa has made in MENA is to implement central bank-mandated increases in the Card Verification Method limit. In circumstances where a customer would be required to insert a PIN when a transaction exceeded a certain amount, the new limits enable consumers to tap to pay using their card, mobile phone or contactless wearable device for larger ticket purchases. In countries such as Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Morocco, we've been working with our local government and industry partners to implement these new limits on Visa contactless cards to support the growing appetite for contactless payments in those markets. In Kuwait, we've enabled a rise of the current limit of KD 10 to KD 25, a 150 percent increase.

By raising limits, we can help to deliver this fast, easy and secure way to pay to more customers and further support merchants and front-line staff. Our priority at this time is to maintain operational stability, security and resilience of the Visa network so that cardholders and merchants can get what they need with peace of mind.

In addition, when used with a mobile phone or wearable device, contactless technology has additional layers of security that use protocols such as tokenization2 to ensure sensitive information cannot be compromised. Contactless cards also use the same dynamic EMV Chip security as contact chips, and each transaction includes a unique one-time code, to ensure that stolen information cannot be used to create counterfeit cards.

Contactless payments provide consumers with the confidence to make essential purchases while at the same time delivering a consistent and secure experience. The collaboration and support across the industry for raising limits, including Visa's work with government entities, shows the importance and need for the right solutions. Visa remains committed - now and always - to supporting consumers, merchants and clients during these challenging times. 0

Health & Science

NASA, SpaceX target historic spaceflight

WASHINGTON: NASA and SpaceX said Friday they were pressing ahead with plans to launch astronauts to space from US soil for the first time in nearly a decade later on this month, despite the coronavirus pandemic. Robert Behnken and Douglas Hurley, both veterans of the Space Shuttle program that was shuttered in 2011, will blast off from the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Florida on May 27.

Should the mission succeed, the US will have achieved its goal of no longer having to buy seats on Russian Soyuz rockets to give its astronauts rides to the International Space Station (ISS). It is also an important stage in NASA's new economic model: the space agency has spent billions on contracts with both SpaceX and Boeing to develop space-ships that will each have to make six round trips to the ISS.

The model is supposed to save taxpayers from financial black holes of past programs, as well as some still to come notably the giant Space Launch System rocket that is supposed to take NASA back to the Moon but is plagued by cost overrun and scheduling delays.

NASA administrator Jim Bridenstine told reporters that the SpaceX Crew Dragon capsule will be only the fifth class of US spacecraft to take humans into orbit, after the storied Mercury, Gemini, Apollo and Space Shuttle programs. "If you look globally, this will be the ninth time in history when we put humans on a brand new spacecraft," said Bridenstine.

"We're going to do it here in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic. I'm going to tell you this is a high priority mission for the United States of America," he added.

Behnken and Hurley, who have been

training for the "Demo-2" mission for years, will dock with the International Space Station (ISS) and remain there for between one to four months, depending on when the next mission takes place, said NASA's Steve Stich. Crew Dragon is able to remain in orbit for around four months (119 days). Hurley, who was the pilot on the last Space Shuttle mission, admitted it was "disappointing" that the launch won't be a public affair, with crowds discouraged from gathering at Cape Canaveral to witness the spectacle.

"We won't have the luxury of our family and friends being there at Kennedy to watch the launch but it's obviously, the right thing to do in the current environment," he said.

Win for SpaceX

The mission is a major milestone for SpaceX, the company founded by Elon Musk, who also leads and founded Tesla. His firm, which was started in 2002, has now overtaken aerospace behemoth Boeing, which failed in the uncrewed demonstration mission of its Starliner spacecraft last year and will have to start over.

SpaceX, which has received billions of dollars from NASA since the late 2000s, has been supplying cargo to the ISS since 2012, and has established itself as the leader in the private space sector thanks to its reusable rocket, the Falcon 9. "I'll feel a little relief when they're in orbit, I'll feel more relief when they get to the station and then obviously, I will start sleeping again when they're back safely on the planet Earth," said Gwynne Shotwell, the company's chief operating officer.

The pandemic has, naturally, impacted



In this file photo, employees of SpaceX work on the Crew Dragon reusable spacecraft after a press conference at SpaceX headquarters in Hawthorne, California. — AFP

the program, but Shotwell said all precautions were being taken to protect the astronauts. "We are ensuring that only essential personnel are near them. They're wearing masks and gloves. We're cleaning the training facility twice daily.

"I think we're really doing a great job to ensure that we are not impacting the safety or the health of the astronauts' lives." Half of SpaceX's engineers have been teleworking, and on the day of the launch, NASA personnel in the mission

control room will be spaced six feet (two meters) apart.

Takeoff is scheduled for 4:42 pm (2042 GMT) on May 27, with space station docking scheduled about 19 hours later, on May 28. — AFP

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View of Brazilian mural artist Eduardo Kobra's recent work "Coexistence" -which shows children wearing face masks due to the new coronavirus, COVID-19, bearing symbols of different religions (from left to right) Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism and Hinduism in Iguazu, some 100 km from Sao Paulo, Brazil.—AFP photos



Brazilian mural artist Eduardo Kobra poses next to his recent work "Coexistence".

Pandemic-era celebrities struggle to strike appropriate tone

As the coronavirus pandemic has forced populations worldwide indoors, many celebrities have harnessed their star power to try and raise spirits online, dubbing the illness a great unifier. But expressions of solidarity have rung hollow for some social media users fatigued by content that's perhaps well-intentioned but backdropped by hot tubs, crackling fireplaces, or backyard pools. The most recent eye rolls came after the announcement that some 200 celebrities and politicians — including billionaire Oprah, superstar actress Julia Roberts and former US

worldwide tuned in to a recent star-studded marathon special intended to celebrate essential workers that featured headliners The Rolling Stones and Taylor Swift performing from their homes. Even for those loving to hate, the streamed sing-alongs and Instagram live soliloquys keep the internet rapt, perhaps temporarily alleviating the boredom of life indoors. Whether messages of the rich and famous fascinate or leave a bad taste, that attention remains "says more about our culture than these actual celebrities," according to professor Cheryl Thompson of Toronto's Ryerson University. "We might not want to admit it to ourselves," Thompson told AFP, but "we look to them, in some ways, to be our gauge for what we should think and feel."

'Out of touch'

The scholar of creative industries pointed to Tom Hanks' announcement in mid-March that he had contracted coronavirus, saying that news convinced many people the infection was serious. Indeed, Jenna Anderson said the realities of coronavirus first hit her once Hanks — whom she called a "national-treasure type" — went public with his illness. The 30-year-old previously living in Australia, where Hanks quarantined, is now isolating with her family in Houston. But Anderson said while some content has been useful — stars' descriptions of symptoms, for example — "most of what sticks in my mind are negative experiences where celebrities do seem a bit out of touch."

The internet slammed talkshow personality Ellen DeGeneres when she joked self-quarantine in her glassy California mansion was like "being in jail." Arnold Schwarzenegger citizen spring-breakers from his jacuzzi, cigar in hand, while a coterie of stars led by Gal Gadot became a laughingstock after dropping an awkward cover of John Lennon's "Imagine," including



In this file photo US actor Tom Hanks and wife Rita Wilson arrive for the 77th annual Golden Globe Awards at The Beverly Hilton hotel in Beverly Hills, California.

president George W. Bush — would participate in a 24-hour long "Call to Unite" livestream event starting this Friday to encourage donating to COVID-19 relief efforts. "If only they knew ppl with money," tweeted journalist Asteed Herndon of the announcement.

And yet, we watch: more than 270 million people



In this file photo US singer Britney Spears arrives for the premiere of Sony Pictures' "Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood" at the TCL Chinese Theatre in Hollywood, California.

Zoe Kravitz perched by her fireplace while others appeared to be meandering across their estates. Many stars "seem to really try to keep in the forefront of people's minds in a way that seems unnecessary to me, based on what I assume about how much money they have and how successful they are," Anderson said.

Still, Thompson said "we've always had this sense that celebrities come and take us away from the hard times." During World War II, for example, the US government called Hollywood stars to visit troops or promote war bond sales. Many celebrities today have deployed their wealth, including entertainment mogul Rihanna's donation of medical equipment to New York state and \$5 million to several relief organizations, or Beyonce's \$6 million donation to nonprofits. Country icon Dolly Parton meanwhile is financing Vanderbilt University research efforts for a vaccine. Beyond the cash, entertainment can soothe — and Thompson pre-



In this file photo comedian Ellen DeGeneres introduces Lil Nas X and Billy Ray Cyrus during the 62nd Annual Grammy Awards in Los Angeles.

dicted the trauma of the current moment could fuel more intriguing art in years to come. "The struggle has always brought with it amazing creative outputs," she said.

Until then there is plenty of celebrity content relying less on platitudes, and more on entertaining the masses by leaning into the absurd. Britney Spears has been offering eyebrow-raising comic relief including an abrupt tale of the time she "burned down her gym" — no one was harmed — while "Mad Men" star January Jones has taken on the role of quarantine eccentric, offering a recipe for a "human stew" detox bath. And "Jurassic Park" actor Sam Neill has been posting playful albeit slightly unhinged videos — including a bit where he voices a garden gnome who schools listeners on self-isolation.—AFP



This handout photo released by Wildlife Reserves Singapore shows a caretaker looking after penguins roaming around the empty surroundings of Singapore Zoo while it is closed to the public.—AFP photos

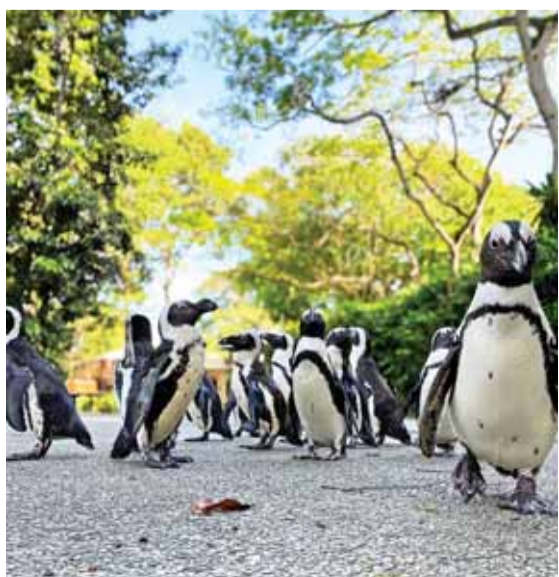
For Singapore penguins, shuttered zoo is flippin' fun

One cute group is making the most of Singapore's partial virus lockdown — penguins at the city-state's zoo, who are being given the run of the empty complex and reveling in the chance to do some exploring. With the zoo closed to the public as the country battles a worsening virus outbreak, the African penguins had little in the way of stimulation without passers-by stopping to admire them. So their keepers began taking them on outings around the complex, nudging the pint-sized explorers to check out the area around their exhibit and the children's playground.

The colony of around a dozen birds appeared unimpressed by the climbing-frame and the slide, and soon waddled off to the next section. Further along, several life-sized models of sea lions — which occasionally eat penguins in the wild — gave them pause for thought. But they soon regained their courage and were back to hopping over rocks, with a pair later splitting off from the main group to go and explore behind a shed. As well as roaming the empty walkways of the zoo, the penguins have also been tackling an obstacle course which has been specially designed to keep them entertained. They got their first glance as they jumped out of a pool in their sandy enclosure — and initially stopped dead in their tracks, appearing baffled at the sight.

One brave soul timidly ventured onto the course, waddling slowly through the sand between colorful plastic balls, crossing a small bridge and navigating trenches, before the rest of the colony followed. The zoo says the workout strengthens the creatures' leg muscles and helps them navigate new environments. Their natural habitat is off the southwestern coast of Africa. "The new normal presented opportunities for our African penguins to make discoveries at Singapore zoo," said the animal park's operator. Singapore has reported more than 16,000 virus infections and has imposed curbs to halt the spread of the outbreak, including closing schools and most workplace.—AFP

Penguins roaming around the empty surroundings of Singapore Zoo while its closed to the public.



Forget me not: Japan aquarium seeks video-chats for eels

A Japanese aquarium closed during the coronavirus outbreak is asking people to make video calls to their eels so the sensitive creatures remember humans exist and don't pose a threat. The Sumida Aquarium, housed in the landmark Tokyo Skytree tower, has been closed since the start of March and its animals have become used to a largely human-free environment during the two-month calm. But the aquarium said the "unprecedented situation" was having some unexpected downsides. "Creatures in the aquarium don't see humans except keepers and they have started forgetting about humans," it said on its Twitter account this week.

"Garden eels in particular disappear into the sand and hide every time the keepers pass by," it noted. That is causing difficulties for keepers trying to check on the health of the animals. "Let us make an emergency plea," the aquarium wrote. "Could you show your face to our garden eels from your home?" it requested, calling the event a "face-showing festival". Garden eels are very sensitive and wary by nature but 300 of them living in a tank at the aquarium had become used to humans and rarely hid in the sand when approached by visitors.

In a bid to reacquaint the eels with humans, the aquarium is setting up five tablets facing the tank housing the delicate creatures, with eel enthusiasts asked to connect through iPhones or iPads via the FaceTime app. Once the video calls start, people are supposed to show their faces, wave and talk to the eels. But given the tender nature of the animals, callers are asked not to shout. The "face-showing festival" is scheduled for May 3-5, at the height of Japan's Golden Week holiday period, when many people usually travel. This Golden Week however, people have been asked to stay at home while the country remains under a state of emergency over the coronavirus.



A handout picture shows the spotted garden eel displayed at the aquarium.

The aquarium's plea has attracted plenty of support, under the Japanese hashtag #PleaseRememberHumans. "When you gaze at the garden eels, the garden eels gaze at you." Understood. I'm happy to take part," one Twitter user wrote. "They need training to learn humans are not a threat!" another wrote. "Interesting." And among those eager to take part were many calling on the aquarium to offer access via another app, so that those using PCs and phones with Android operating systems could also take part. "I never regretted my Android phone this much before," one wrote.—AFP



In this handout picture tablets are facing the tank housing the delicate garden eels, with eel enthusiasts asked to connect through iPhones or iPads via the FaceTime app, in Tokyo, during a rehearsal for the upcoming face-showing festival. — AFP photos



Lifestyle | Features



Maya Khadra and Rakan Ghossein stand in front of a priest during their wedding at the church Our Lady Of Assistance in the village of Shemlan south of Beirut. —AFP photos



Maya Khadra and Rakan Ghossein pose for a picture during their wedding at the church Our Lady Of Assistance.



Maya Khadra and Rakan Ghossein during their wedding at the church.

Virus scuppers Lebanon dream weddings

For months Maya and Rakan had looked forward to their dream wedding in the Vatican — but the coronavirus pandemic forced them to settle for a tiny church ceremony in Lebanon. Spring usually marks the opening of the Lebanese wedding season. But this year the novel coronavirus has dashed plans and hit the Mediterranean country's thriving events industry hard. Maya Khadra, 26, had hoped for a magical day when she finally tied the knot with her fiancé — not, she said, just a dozen guests in "an empty church". But on Sunday in the village of Shemlan south of Beirut, they exchanged vows before a few close family members as rain gushed down outside. "Corona(virus) changed everything, including our wedding," the green-eyed bride told AFP.

"They called us from the Vatican and told us they had cancelled all weddings for nine months, so we had two choices: postpone, or get married anyway," she said. They opted for the second. "You don't know when corona(virus) will end, and postponing is a waste of time," the young journalist said. On Sunday, she wore an elegant white dress and a flower in her hair as she wed 28-year-old gym owner Rakan Ghossein. The groom said they decided on a "shorter

wedding" to keep guests safe. At the reception hall, the bride's sister fielded a stream of video calls from well-wishers unable to attend. Khadra said the hardest part was celebrating her big day without her friends. "They were more excited than we were," she said, her eyes welling up.

Fireworks, drones

Lebanon has been on lockdown since mid-March to rein in the COVID-19 respiratory illness, which has infected 721 and killed 24 people in the Mediterranean country, according to official figures. The airport and restaurants have closed, and mass gatherings are forbidden. It's a serious disappointment for young couples in a country where hundreds are usually invited to celebrate. Outside the church, Rakan's father said he would have preferred a wedding with "a thousand people" for his son, but the coronavirus had dashed the hopes of both families. For the more wealthy, weddings normally include lavish buffets, DJs, fireworks, flowers, photoshoots and even buzzing drones in the sky above.

Thousands of young Lebanese living abroad flock back every year to tie the knot in their homeland,

especially among those living in the Gulf. Events staged by professional wedding planners can cost from \$200,000 to \$800,000 on average, but sometimes reach as high as \$2 million. In recent years, banks have started offering special wedding loans for young couples to cope. Chanel Fayad too had been excitedly counting the days to her wedding, but she and her fiancé had to postpone when the government imposed confinement measures. "We'll just have a short ceremony," the 29-year-old school teacher told AFP by telephone. Chanel and her fiancé had originally planned to have a wedding dinner with her friends and family over Easter, but they had to cancel the event after the government introduced an all-day lockdown on Sundays. She hopes they can gather with friends when the coronavirus confinement ends, but she noted life will not return to normal for some time. "Anybody who thinks it will get better after the end of coronavirus is wrong," she said. "It's going to get a lot worse, economy-wise."

Double trouble

Lebanon is grappling with its worse economic crisis since the end of the 1975-1990 civil war, with tens

of thousands losing their jobs or part of their salaries even before the advent of the pandemic. The wedding industry has long kept thousands in jobs, working in catering, the hotel sector, flower arrangement as well as decor, furniture and lighting. But Pamela Mansour Muhanna, co-owner of the Mine event planning agency, says business is looking dire. "More than 75 percent of our events have been cancelled," she said.

"We're facing a twin challenge. Even if the coronavirus crisis ends, we'll then have to contend with the economic turmoil," she said. This is why she and her partner a few months ago started up a business in Saudi Arabia's capital. After the pandemic, "we'll work on strengthening our business abroad," she said. Perhaps a gradual easing of restrictions over the next few months will allow her agency to hold a few events at the end of the summer. But inside the church in Shemlan, priest Hanna Khadra says he thinks weddings should go ahead as planned. "Love is stronger than coronavirus and death," he said, smiling. "Love cannot be postponed." —AFP



In this file photo Gigi Hadid (right) and Zayn Malik arrive for the Costume Institute Benefit at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. —AFP

GIGI HADID CONFIRMS PREGNANCY

Gigi Hadid and Zayn Malik are expecting their first child, the supermodel told US talkshow host Jimmy Fallon Friday. Hadid has been dating Malik on-and-off since 2015, celebrating her 25th birthday with him in quarantine on her mother's Pennsylvania farm last weekend. US media had reported she was pregnant after family sources spoke to TMZ. "Obviously, you know, we wish we could've announced it on our own terms, but we're very excited and happy and grateful for everyone's

well wishes and support," Hadid told Fallon via video-link.

She is quarantining in New Hope, roughly 30 miles outside Philadelphia with Malik, her mother Yolanda Hadid, sister Bella and friend Leah McCarthy. But Hadid — who has modeled for Chanel and Victoria's Secret among others — said it was a "nice silver lining to be able to be home, be together, and really experience it day by day." —AFP

Legendary drummer and afrobeat co-founder Tony Allen dies

Legendary Nigerian drummer Tony Allen, who created afrobeat along with his old bandmate Fela Kuti, died suddenly at the age of 79 in Paris on Thursday, his manager told AFP. "We don't know the exact cause of death," manager Eric Trosset said, adding it was not linked to the coronavirus. "He was in great shape, it was quite sudden. I spoke to him at 1:00 pm (1100 GMT), then two

and 1970s. During that time the pair created afrobeat, combining West African musical styles such as highlife and fuji music with American imports jazz and funk. Afrobeat went on to become one of the totemic genres of 20th century African music. Over Allen's thrilling beat, Fela laid out his revolutionary and pan-African message, which led him to become one of the abiding icons of the struggle for freedom across the continent.

Allen and Fela recorded around 40 albums together in Africa '70, before parting ways after a mythic 26-year collaboration. Such was the hole that Allen left in his band, Fela needed four drummers to replace him. Allen taught himself to play drums from the age of 18, drawing inspiration from American jazz greats Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker as well as contemporary African music. He remained hugely influential and beloved by generations of musicians. British musician and producer Brian Eno has called Allen "perhaps the greatest drummer who ever lived". Allen was the drummer in the supergroup The Good, the Bad & the Queen, also featuring Blur singer Damon Albarn and The Clash bassist Paul Simonon, which released its second album in 2018. He lived in the Paris suburb Courbevoie. —AFP



In this file photo taken on June 21, 2017 Nigerian drummer Tony Allen and his band play at the courtyard (Cour d'Honneur) of the Palais Royal in Paris, for the annual "Fete de la Musique" (music day). —AFP

hours later he was sick and taken to Pitié-Salpêtrière hospital where he died." Allen was the drummer and musical director of Fela Kuti's band Africa '70 in the 1960s



In this file photo taken on November 26, 2013, then 18-year-old poet Yahya Hassan gives a reading in Vollsmose, Denmark. —AFP photos



In this photo taken on November 17, 2019, Danish-Palestinian poet Yahya Hassan attends the bookfair at Bella Center in Copenhagen to promote his second book.

Danish poet Yahya Hassan dead at 24

Danish-Palestinian bad-boy poet Yahya Hassan, who stormed on to Denmark's literary scene in 2013 and quickly became a household name, has died aged just 24, his publisher said Thursday. The exact cause of his death on Wednesday has not been made public but police said they did not believe it was a criminal act. "Twenty-four years. That's nothing, this is a catastrophe," Simon Pasternak, head of publisher Gyldendal, said in an Instagram post. "I have known him, since he was 16 years, this brilliant boy with enormous talent."

Police in Aarhus, the country's second largest city where Hassan lived, told local media that they had responded to reports of the death of a man in his mid-20s. "Currently there is nothing in our investigation that indicates that this is a criminal act," police spokesman Jakob Christiansen told newspaper BT. Hassan's debut poetry collection was printed in a record 120,000 copies after it was released in 2013, in a country where poetry collections are usually printed in the hundreds. Writing in all capital letters without any punctuation, he used street slang and blunt word play to deliver a damning indictment of his parents' generation of immigrants who came to Denmark in the 1980s, describ-

ing domestic violence, benefit fraud and religious hypocrisy on the Aarhus housing estate where he grew up.

In the poem "Satellite dish" he wrote: "WE HAD NO DANISH CHANNELS/WE HAD AL JAZEERA ... WE HAD NO PLANS/BECAUSE ALLAH HAD PLANS FOR US." "Yahya insisted on not bending to anyone, he didn't want to be anyone's representative... He wanted to be himself," Pasternak said. Many young Danes of immigrant origin disliked Hassan for his negative views on their communities and their religion. In November 2013, he was assaulted in Copenhagen's main train station by a 24-year-old man previously convicted of trying to commit an act of terror. In November 2019, Hassan released a follow up poetry collection, which like the first was named after himself, also to critical acclaim. In between, he made headlines more for his rantings, his attempts to enter politics and his dealings with justice than for the quality of his writing. In 2016, he was sentenced to one year and nine months in prison for shooting a 17-year-old boy with a pistol, wounding the boy's foot and leg. —AFP



In this file photo US singer/songwriter Beyoncé arrives for the world premiere of Disney's "The Lion King" at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood. — AFP

KARDASHIAN PARIS ROBBER RELEASED FROM JAIL IN SEPARATE CASE

The alleged mastermind behind the group that robbed American reality TV star Kim Kardashian at gunpoint in Paris was released from a jail Thursday, where he was serving time for a separate case. The gem heist in October 2016 saw five masked men walk away from Kardashian's luxurious Paris apartment with \$10.6 million (nine million euros) worth of jewels, including a diamond ring gifted by her rapper husband Kanye West. The 60-something alleged ringleader behind the heist, Aomar Ait Khedache, has not yet been tried for the burglary, but was serving time for another robbery.

Dubbed "Omar the Elder", Khedache was released from prison early for health reasons, the court in Nanterre and his lawyer said. Khedache was sentenced to five years in jail in 2017 for a robbery two years prior in the chic Paris suburb of Neuilly-sur-Seine. His lawyer Chloe Arnoux welcomed his release,

saying it was the result of a long battle to get him out of jail. She said her client was "actually very far from the fantasized image of great bandit that he is portrayed as" publicly. His release would allow him to adequately prepare for the Kardashian robbery trial, which has not yet been scheduled. "He will now be able to appear at his trial in a dignified condition, which the detention would not have allowed," she said. The dramatic Kardashian robbery, worthy of a Hollywood plotline, made headlines around the world.

The star, famous for her curves and expensive tastes, was robbed at gunpoint, gagged and locked in the bathroom before thieves did away with a trove of jewels. In addition to the 18.88-carat ring they also took several pieces of gold and diamond jewelry, in what was the biggest heist of one individual in France in two decades. —AFP

Beyoncé, Megan Thee Stallion drop remix for coronavirus relief

Pop royalty Beyoncé has teamed up with rap star Megan Thee Stallion to release a remixed version of the latter's hit "Savage," with the proceeds benefiting a disaster relief organization in Houston providing meals during the coronavirus pandemic. The two superstar natives of the Texas metropolis dropped the track to much fanfare on social media, as people desperate for contact remain home-bound to halt the infection's spread. "Listening to Beyoncé rap again is the closest thing to human touch I've felt in 8 weeks," tweeted Aaron Edwards, co-host of the traveling show Pop-Up Magazine.

Megan Thee Stallion originally released "Savage" in March on her EP "Suga," with the song quickly going viral on TikTok thanks to an accompanying dance challenge. "Hips tik tok when I dance," raps Beyoncé in the new remix. "Left cheek, right cheek, drop it low and let it swang." The megastar also teased admirers by name-checking the platform OnlyFans with a loose suggestion she might start an account. OnlyFans launched in 2016 as a hub for influencers and celebrities to charge a subscription fee for photos and videos, but it's more commonly known as a hotspot for adult and pornographic content.

Houston's Mayor Sylvester Turner said in honor of the artists' contributions to battle coronavirus the city would soon honor them with "their own respective days." Beyoncé had already donated six million dollars through her foundation to community organizations and mental health support in the hard-hit cities of Houston, New York, New Orleans and Detroit. —AFP



In this file photo US singer/songwriter Beyoncé arrives for the world premiere of Disney's "The Lion King" at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood. —AFP

Refugees in Germany rally to help battle coronavirus

BERLIN: In a community center in Berlin's Spandau district, two large rooms are filled with the clunk and whirr of sewing machines, rolls of colorful fabric strewn across the tables. About a dozen migrants from countries including Iran and Afghanistan are busy making face masks to donate to the community - and their work is in high demand, with a queue stretching down the stairs and out the front door.

Germany has made masks compulsory on public transport and in many shops as part of measures to control the spread of the coronavirus, which has claimed almost 6,000 lives and led to sweeping restrictions on public life. But according to project coordinator Afsaneh Afraze-Ketabi, the crisis has had an unexpected upside for many migrants living in Germany.

Engaging in volunteer work is helping them to strengthen their ties with the community, improve their language skills and build confidence, said the 36-year-old from Iran. "Many people have been given the courage to show their skills, to show their faces... and strengthen their self-confidence." Germany has seen a large uptick in the number of people coming from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, with more than a million arriving between 2015 and 2016 alone. The influx became a thorny political issue and fuelled the rise of the controversial far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party, now Germany's largest opposition party.

Cooking, shopping

Thomas Noppen, whose charity Go Volunteer runs a website that matches refugees with volunteering opportuni-

ties, is keen to show that new arrivals can make a positive contribution. "Many participants see it as a cultural given to do charity," he said. Since April 2018, around 500 migrants have applied for volunteer work through the Engagierte Newcomer (Engaged Newcomers) website.

A new section dedicated to the current crisis - Newcomer Gegen Corona (Newcomers against Corona) - is due to launch this week. "We receive lots of feedback from refugees that their main motivation is 'giving back' to the host community," Noppen said. This is true for Jamila Ahmadi, 45, from Afghanistan, who has been sewing up to 50 masks a day for the Spandau project. "Everyone has to do something to help if they can," she said through her own white and gold mask. "Germany is helping us, and now we want and have to help the people."

Across the city, in Oberschoeneweide, Abdulrahim Al-Khattab has been helping to run a COVID-19 neighborhood volunteering project. The 31-year-old from Syria and two of his friends have set up a Facebook group and put up notes in the hallways of their buildings asking if anyone needs help with their grocery shopping, medicines or other errands. Before they came to Germany five years ago, Khattab and his friends volunteered in Syria, helping to provide food, clothes, medicine and new homes for people displaced by the civil war. "This experience taught us a lot," he said. "In this difficult situation, we think of (the German) people just as we thought of our people."

Meanwhile, in Berlin's central Schoeneberg district, a huge pan full of lamb steaks is sizzling in the kitchen



BERLIN: Syrian chef and restaurant owner Malakeh Jazmati prepares meals in the kitchen of her restaurant on April 21, 2020 for workers in a nearby supermarket. — AFP

of Malakeh Jazmati's empty restaurant. With her doors closed to customers, the 32-year-old from Syria has decided instead to cook free lunches for supermarket workers - who she sees as the unsung heroes of the pandemic. "I know they live in a very hard situa-

tion and they work under pressure, so I want to give them something back," she said.

Jazmati came to Germany in 2015 and opened her restaurant two years ago. She will add rice and aubergine to the lamb to make one of her signa-

ture dishes, known as makloubeh. "In this time, volunteering is not something we want to do... or we don't want, it's something we should do," she said. "Everyone should do something in this time. We need to be together." — AFP

Qat markets in Yemen flourish...

Continued from Page 1

A wad of the leaves is packed into the cheek and slowly chewed. The World Health Organization estimates that 90 percent of adult males in Yemen partake for several hours a day, with some women and children also adopting the habit. Policemen can be seen on the streets chewing the green plant, stashed in plastic bags next to them while they carry out their duties. "The chewing of qat leaves releases chemicals structurally related to amphetamines, which give the chewer a mild high that some say is comparable to drinking strong coffee," according to the WHO.

Qat sellers in Sanaa, the northern capital that is controlled by the Iran-backed Houthi rebels, continue to display bags of their product to customers in the markets, transacting without precautionary measures like masks or gloves. Yemen has been largely spared the effects of the coronavirus pandemic, with a total of six cases recorded so far, but the country announced its first two deaths from the respiratory disease on Wednesday.

The United Nations has warned that six years of war - pitting the Houthis against the government and their backers led by Saudi Arabia - has left the health system in tatters, and a major outbreak would lead to a humanitarian catastrophe. The insurgents, who control much of the north including Sanaa, have suspended schools and flights to ward off the pandemic but so far have been unable to shut down the qat markets.

Many Yemenis resorted to selling qat after the

war broke out and their salaries dried up. Ahmed Saleh, a public school teacher who has not been paid in four years, said that selling qat is his "main source of income". "Closing the markets because of the coronavirus will lead to starvation," he told AFP. "Many people depend on the buying and selling of qat."

Muthir Al-Marouni, director general of the insurgent-run health department in Sanaa, said he expects the markets will close soon because they "could become a major source for the spread of the virus". "People's lives are more important than the markets," he told AFP. However, he admitted that such a decision would be hard to enforce considering how many people depend on the trade. "The decision must be carefully studied and a solution found... to ensure people can continue to live," Marouni said.

While many people continue to shop at crowded qat markets, others in Sanaa have opted for home delivery to fuel hours-long sessions with family and friends. "After the spread of the coronavirus, many are scared to go to the market and have asked that their qat be delivered to their homes," seller Ghaleb Al-Huseimy told AFP. "They have one condition - that I be the only one that touches the product."

Omar Al-Abi is one customer who has opted for the delivery service because of fears of catching the virus. "Qat could become a primary reason for the fast spread of the virus because the markets are extremely crowded," he told AFP. "More than 50 people could have touched one bag." Committed users like Walid Al-Dhahawi say it will take more than a pandemic to stop Yemenis from chewing qat - a cultural tradition passed from generation to generation. "There is no event without qat," he said during a long session with friends. "It is the glue in society... during times of happiness and mourning." — AFP

phased, staged way" after that.

In Asia, India announced that the lockdown on its 1.3 billion people - the world's biggest - would continue for two more weeks from May 4. And in Singapore, the government said yesterday that pet food stores and hair salons will be allowed to reopen on May 12. Most of the city-state's infections have been detected at dormitories housing migrant workers, and their confinement was extended to June 1.

The virus restrictions also put a damper on May Day celebrations worldwide on Friday as many labor unions delayed their rallies and some held online events, while a determined few hit the streets in face-masks in defiance of lockdown orders. May Day carried extra significance this year because of the staggering number of people put out of work by the pandemic, with the global economy in a tailspin and facing its worst downturn since the Great Depression.

Stock markets tumbled again on Friday after President Trump's unproven allegation that the virus may have come from a lab in Wuhan - the central Chinese city where the disease first emerged late last year. Beijing has rejected the accusation, and scientists believe the virus jumped from animals to humans. The White House has accused Chinese authorities of mishandling the outbreak and putting American lives at risk.

The disease overwhelmed healthcare infrastructure when it hit the United States, putting immense pressure on medical workers. Some US medics relied on experience in other countries to fight the virus. David Callaway, a doctor and academic who formerly worked on disease response in conflict-hit nations such as South Sudan and Iraq, said he found overseas epidemics easier to handle in some ways. "Family and loved ones, you can put them in a box and you use them as a source of motivation and inspiration when things get rough, but you know they are safe," he told AFP. "A pandemic at home, you know that your family and your loved ones are still at risk, their lives hang on the line." — AFP

Ramadan soap with Jewish characters stirs Mideast debate

DUBAI: A period drama about the trials of a Jewish midwife airing on Saudi-controlled MBC for Ramadan has drawn both criticism as an attempt to promote Arab "normalization" with Israel and praise for a rare exploration of the Gulf's social history. "Umm Haroun", a fictional series about a multi-religious community in an unspecified Gulf Arab state in the 1930s to 1950s, began airing on Friday as part of MBC's lineup for the Muslim holy month, when viewership typically spikes.

It comes at a time when several Gulf states have broken with the recent past and made overtures to Israel, with which they have found common ground in confronting Iran. Some, including Saudi Arabia, have also backed a US Middle East peace plan to move on from a conflict they say holds back the Arab world. Egypt and Jordan are the only Arab states that have peace deals with Israel.

An official from the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas, Basim Naem, condemned the series before it aired and told Reuters that portraying Jewish people in a sympathetic light was "cultural aggression and brain washing". Hamas, like other Palestinian groups, is vehemently opposed to the peace plan laid out by U.S. President Donald Trump's administration. A group of regional organizations against normalizing ties with Israel circulated a poster on social media urging viewers to boycott "the wicked drama", which was produced by Kuwait- and United Arab Emirates-based companies.

The show's writers, Bahraini brothers Muhammad and Ali Abdel Halim Shams, told Reuters that it had no political message. "People have spoken and judged before seeing it," said Muhammad. "The message focuses on the ways of Muslims centered on showing love, good intention and peace to non-Muslims." MBC, the Arab world's largest private broadcaster, said that according to its data the show is the top-rated Gulf drama in Saudi Arabia for Ramadan and among the top five dramas across genres.

MBC spokesman Mazen Hayek said Umm Haroun's main message was a human one - a nurse who heals people "irrespective of any consideration". "It also focuses on tolerance, moderation and openness, showcasing that the Middle East was once a region where acceptance of one another was the norm versus the twisted interpretation and stereotyping of the region by hardliners and extremists, over the last decades."

Saudi authorities took a controlling stake in MBC Group in 2018 as they seized assets from those detained in an anti-corruption drive launched by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. MBC, which plans to move its headquarters from Dubai to Riyadh, has courted controversy before. Past shows dealt with sensitive issues like domestic violence and Islamist militancy.

The writers said the main character, Umm Haroun, after whom the show is named, was loosely inspired by real-life Jewish midwife Umm Jan, who arrived in Bahrain from Iraq in the 1930s. A disclaimer during the first episode said the characters and events were imaginary. Some people in Bahrain, which still has a small Jewish community, took to social media to share pictures of and a 1977 TV interview with Umm Jan, who is widely regarded as a symbol of public service in Bahrain. — Reuters

Washington approves virus...

Continued from Page 1

"Hopefully, we're going to come in below that 100,000 lives lost, which is a horrible number nevertheless," said Trump, after suggesting earlier in the week the country could expect 60,000 or 70,000 fatalities.

Texas became the largest US state yet to ease curbs, while anti-lockdown demonstrations were held in several states - including California, where officials had re-closed beaches beginning Friday to avoid a repeat of last weekend when crowds flocked to the shoreline. In Huntington Beach, about 55 km south of Los Angeles, several thousand people rallied to denounce Governor Gavin Newsom's beach shutdown order. "It was the straw that broke the camel's back," protester Monica Beilhard fumed. "It was uncalled for, unnecessary and people out here are making that known," she said.

Governments around the world are struggling to balance the immense political and economic pressure to ease lockdowns with the need for public health measures against the spread of the virus, which has killed more than 236,000 people. Several European countries have begun to lift restrictions, with authorities in some of the hardest-hit parts like Spain reporting signs that the pandemic there was slowing.

Britain announced that it had hit its target of conducting 100,000 coronavirus tests a day, a step toward eventually lifting lockdown rules in the UK - which this week overtook Spain to record the world's third-highest death toll. But Ireland extended its lockdown by two weeks to May 18, with Prime Minister Leo Varadkar saying the nation will reopen "in a slow,

Kim reappears after weeks...

Continued from Page 1

Kim's sudden death would have left Pyongyang facing an unplanned succession for the first time in its history and raised unanswered questions over who would succeed him and take over the North's nuclear arsenal.

China, the North's key diplomatic ally and main provider of trade and aid, is keen to maintain stability in its neighbor and avoid the possibility of an influx of refugees. North Korea is "at the epicenter of an extremely tense security crisis", involving "a nuclear standoff where tens of millions of lives are at stake," Henri Feron, Senior Fellow at the US Center for International Policy, told AFP. "This raises legitimate concerns about the domestic and international instability that his death could cause."

Footage showed Kim in his trademark black suit, waving to hundreds of workers who cheered his appearance and released balloons. He was flanked by senior officials - including his sister and close adviser Kim Yo Jong - and showed no outward signs of ill health. At one point Kim sat in front of a sign that described the event as a factory opening ceremony for May 1, 2020, but his appearance could not be independently verified.

As with previous public appearances during the global coronavirus pandemic, Kim and his entourage were not wearing masks, unlike the crowd of workers at the ceremony. Analysts said Kim could not appear in public wearing a mask as it would make him appear vulnerable to the North Korean people. The North has insisted that it has not seen a single case of coronavirus, although experts say that is unlikely.

Kim's repeated appearances without a mask had led some to speculate that he may have caught the virus. Reporting from inside the isolated North is notoriously

difficult, especially on matters relating to its highly secretive leadership. The North Korean leader had not made a public appearance since presiding over a Workers' Party politburo meeting on April 11, and the following day state media reported that he had inspected fighter jets.

Daily NK, an online media outlet run mostly by North Korean defectors, had reported that Kim was undergoing treatment after a cardiovascular procedure last month. Citing an unidentified source inside the country, it said Kim - who is in his mid-30s - had needed urgent treatment due to heavy smoking, obesity and fatigue. CNN then reported that Washington was "monitoring intelligence" that Kim was in "grave danger" after undergoing surgery, quoting an anonymous US official.

Officials in Seoul had consistently downplayed the reports and a presidential security advisor said that Kim was "alive and well" and staying in the eastern resort town of Wonsan. US President Donald Trump suggested earlier this week that Washington believed Kim to be alive and declined to immediately comment on Kim's apparent re-emergence. Trump and Kim have met three times, although talks on the North's nuclear capabilities have long been stalled with no sign of them resuming.

Analysts say Kim is likely to make another public appearance in the coming days that will be reported by state media. But Pyongyang "probably won't explain Kim's recent absence given the secrecy around the leader's health and schedule," said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor of international studies at Ewha University in Seoul.

Previous absences from the public eye on Kim's part have also prompted speculation about his health. Kim's father and predecessor had been dead for two days before anyone outside the innermost circles of North Korean leadership was aware. In 2014, Kim Jong Un dropped out of sight for nearly six weeks before reappearing with a cane. Days later, the South's spy agency said he had undergone surgery to remove a cyst from his ankle. — AFP

Stars

Daily SuDoku

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

very hard

Friday's Solution

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

hard

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

You are particularly inspired by and sensitive to moments of crises. What that means is that you can't stand to see other people suffer. Sometimes even you suffer because you don't allow yourself to do the things you like best and the things that help you feel fulfilled as a person. Why don't you think about going easier on yourself, just for today? Try to giving some of that famous compassion of yours to yourself.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Your natural compassion may have led you to choose a profession in which healing or helping other people is your primary duty. Even if this isn't the case, Libra, the people around you may seem particularly demanding today. But be careful not to go beyond your personal limits or else you could be the one who needs other people's help! There's nothing wrong with needing help, of course, but one of the biggest lessons for people like you for whom "caretaker" is at the top of your list of skills is learning to care for yourself first.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Days like today push you to act in the areas of your life where you may have hesitated before. Does your love life need a breath of fresh air? Have you been dreaming of a nice candlelit dinner with your partner? Time spent alone, one on one? It's time to stop dreaming of happiness and do what you need to do to get it. It's well within your reach.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

You have a rather strange day in front of you, Scorpio. The celestial atmosphere could be playing tricks on you. You might get aggravated for no reason at all, that is, unless it's because you've been interaction with too many people who don't appreciate the original way you go about doing things. You may feel as if you live in a world full of people who just don't get what you're about.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

You might have questions about the satisfaction you feel about your personal life, Gemini. You may be feeling the pressure of an increasing list of responsibilities and chores. Things seem so urgent to you now. Why not take advantage of this attitude to talk about your deepest desires with your partner or best friend? Things will be much clearer.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

You might be upset by certain financial matters today, Sagittarius. You may realize just how much you've been spending lately and see that things will be tight in the months ahead. It's possible you invested a good deal of time, energy, and money in something that could have waited, and now you can't invest in something much more important.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Today is excellent for just letting your intuition guide you, Cancer. If you have time, you might want to let your mind go and follow the train of thought wherever it takes you. You could find something out about yourself of which you are unaware, something just waiting to be noticed. Remember, your desires are fantasies before they become realities, so dream a little.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Just for today, Capricorn, ignore your habit of always trying to find an explanation for everything. Something is changing inside you and in the way you react to situations. The desire to integrate life's more unpredictable aspects into your personality is the basis for these changes. A lot of your theories are only there to reassure you, but you probably know that. Why not try being honest with yourself?



Leo (July 23-August 22)

Today is the kind of day when all you want to do is think about some rest and relaxation. You're usually such a responsible, conscientious worker that you can afford to escape for just a few minutes. You could visit the world inside of you. You may even find something that's been on your mind for quite some time that requires some action by you now.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

The planets want to make a deal with you today, Aquarius. Either you stay in bed fantasizing about life as a CEO or rock star or you get up, get dressed, and do what you have to do to make your dreams come true. Try and convince yourself once and for all that you don't have to lose your childlike wonder when you enter the real world. That never goes away, no matter how old you get!



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

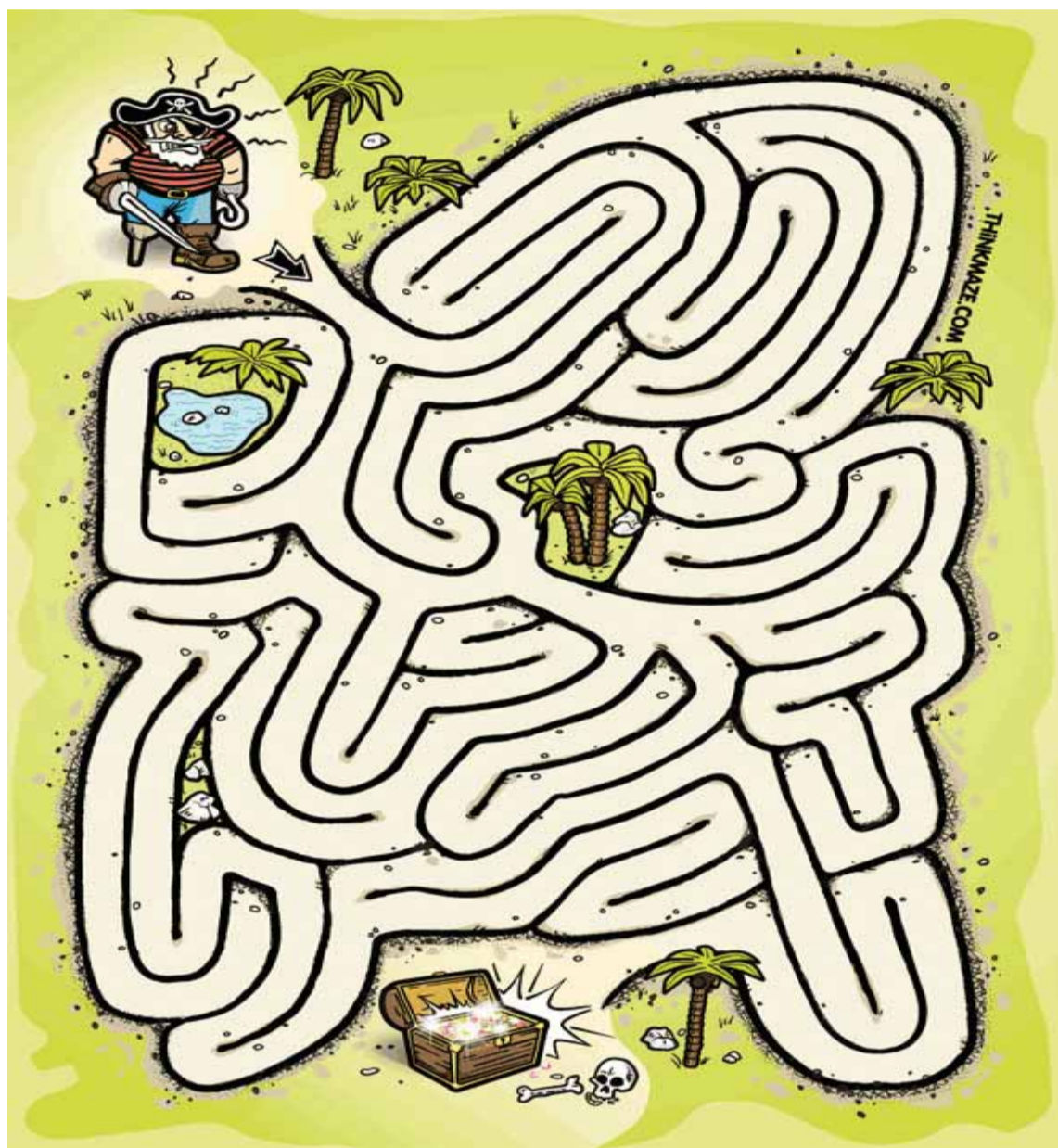
You are an excellent friend, and you take pride in helping the people around you. Have you ever thought about getting involved in a humanitarian cause or giving a few hours of your time every week to your local community? Today, Virgo, these kinds of ideas could become a real part of your life. It's time to use all of your great ideas to help others.



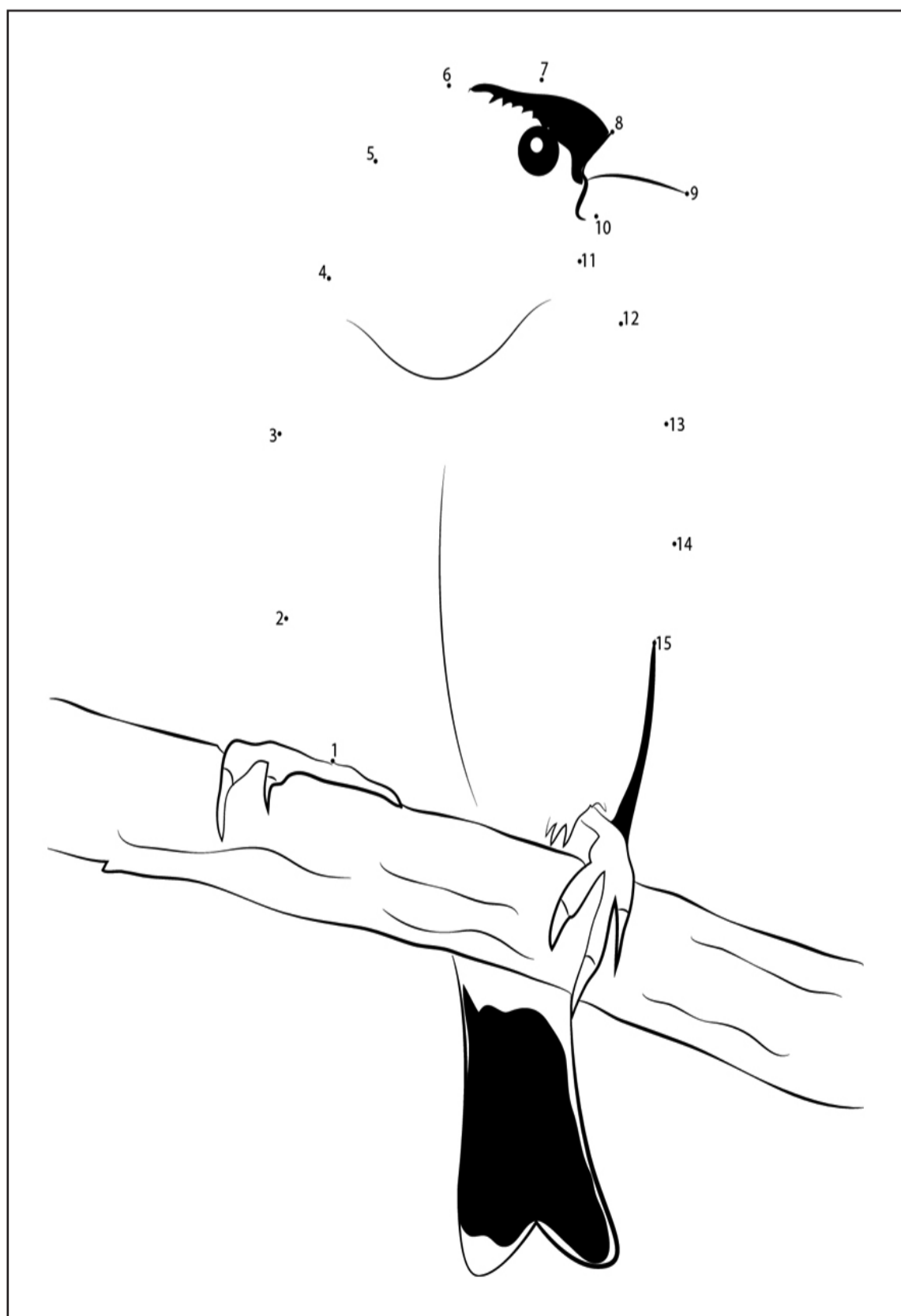
Pisces (February 19-March 20)

It's possible you could meet someone today who will act as a kind of mentor for you. If you do meet this kind of person, don't be a showoff. Listen to what this person has to say to you. It's for your own good. You need to be surrounded and encouraged by people who believe in you, Pisces, and it's good for you to have people around to support you.

Find the way



Join the dots



Crossword



US Presidents

Find all of the US President names. The names can be up, down, forward, backward, or diagonal.

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

- | | | | |
|------------|-----------|----------|------------|
| ADAMS | FORD | KENNEDY | ROOSEVELT |
| ARTHUR | GARFIELD | LINCOLN | TAFT |
| BUCHANAN | GRANT | MADISON | TYLER |
| BUSH | HARDING | MCKINLEY | TRUMAN |
| CARTER | HARRISON | MONROE | TYLER |
| CLEVELAND | HAYES | NIXON | VAN BUREN |
| CLINTON | HOOVER | OBAMA | WASHINGTON |
| COOLIDGE | JACKSON | PIERCE | WILSON |
| EISENHOWER | JEFFERSON | POLK | |
| FILLMORE | JOHNSON | REAGAN | |

Sports

Photo of the day



Timothy Ho Chu-Ting in action with Hong Kong cityscape as background in Fei Ngo Shan, Hong Kong. —Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

Indians pitcher
Clase suspended

LOS ANGELES: MLB slapped Emmanuel Clase with an 80-game ban on Friday, making the Cleveland Indians pitcher the second player from the Dominican Republic to be suspended for using illegal steroids in the past six weeks.

The right-handed pitcher violated MLB's drug prevention and treatment program by testing positive for the prohibited anabolic steroid Boldenone, MLB said in a news release. In February, Houston Astros pitcher Francis Martes, of the Dominican Republic, was given a 162-game ban after testing positive for Boldenone.

Clase was expected to have a major role in the Indians' bullpen this season. His suspension will not begin until the start of the 2020 regular season, which has been delayed due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Boldenone is sold under the brand names Parenabol and Equipoise and is used mainly as a veterinary medicine, including illegally in race horses. The league said the 22-year-old Clase has been suspended without pay but did not say where or how Clase got the steroids.

The Indians said in a news release they don't plan to appeal the decision and that he is free to rejoin the team once his suspension is over. "We were disappointed to learn of today's suspension of Emmanuel Clase for violating Major League Baseball's Joint Drug Prevention and Treatment Program. We fully support Major League Baseball's policy... we will welcome him back after the discipline has been served."

The Indians acquired Clase in the December 2019 trade that sent two-time Cy Young Award winner Corey Kluber to the Texas Rangers. Clase is just the latest in a decades-long list of MLB players who have been suspended for being drug cheats.

New York Yankees slugger Alex Rodriguez missed the entire 2014 season for using performance-enhancing drugs, former league MVP Miguel Tejada was suspended 105 games in 2013 for drug use and Manny Ramirez was slapped with a 100-game ban in 2011 for failing a drug test.

In 2016, Dominican player Jenrry Mejia was banned for life after he tested positive for Boldenone. Mejia's lifetime ban came about because it was his third suspension. —AFP

National Rugby League steps toward return as Warriors cleared to land

Club will follow strictest biosecurity protocols

SYDNEY: The New Zealand Warriors have been cleared to fly into Australia as the National Rugby League moves further toward a season return. Australian officials granted the team an exemption from a ban on international arrivals into the country yesterday morning, taking a big step toward the planned May 28 resumption of the sport.

The NRL season was suspended on March 24 after just two rounds amid a government shutdown of all non-essential gatherings in a bid to stem the spread of coronavirus. "It has been a challenging and often frustrating time for all parties over the last few weeks with so many issues on the table but it has finally come together as of today," Warriors chief executive Cameron George said yesterday.

The Warriors are expected to land in the rural town of Tamworth today afternoon and begin a 14-day isolation in the town, about five hours drive from Sydney, before the start of the NRL.

George said a negotiation over player pay had been resolved and the team had also been given permission to train in Australia. Australia's Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton confirmed 36 play-

ers and staff had been granted an exemption from the travel ban, clearing the flight to arrive in the country.

"This is an excellent outcome for rugby league and another step towards the competition resuming on May 28," Australian Rugby League Commission chair Peter V'landys said. "The club will follow the strictest biosecurity protocols and, like all clubs, will participate in an education day about the protocols on Monday morning." On Friday, the league cleared another hurdle after the Queensland government said players would be able to play, train and travel across borders currently locked down as part of coronavirus restrictions in the country.

"I said I was as keen as anyone else to see the NRL return and I meant it," Queensland Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk said. But after several players were caught breaching social distancing requirements earlier this week, V'landys warned players would have to be responsible to assure the league's return.

"It's up to the players — if there's a slip-up... and they do the wrong thing — that puts the



New Zealand Warriors team

whole rugby league season in doubt," he said. Under plans thrashed out by the league and its broadcast partners this week, the season will be cut from 25 rounds to 20 — including the two already played — with a four-week playoff series

ending in a Grand Final on October 25.

The three-match State of Origin series between New South Wales and Queensland, normally played mid-season, will shift to November for the first time. —AFP

Labuschagne ready for 'heaps of cricket'

SYDNEY: Australia's Marnus Labuschagne is bracing for "heaps and heaps of cricket" once the COVID-19 pandemic subsides, the prolific top order batsman said yesterday.

The global health crisis has halted international sports, postponing several bilateral cricket series and jeopardising this year's Twenty20 World Cup scheduled in October-November in Australia.

"There is going to be a lot of tours that will need to be made up," Labuschagne told Australian Associated Press (AAP). "There's going to be a whole heap of cricket in a very short time frame. We'll be making up for missed time, that schedule is just going to be packed."

"It's going to be a bit different to what we're used to. We're going to have to be ready coming out of this break to play heaps and heaps of cricket." The South Africa-born Labuschagne is probably best prepared for such a scenario, having been adjudged the busiest cricketer in an ESPNcricinfo analysis last October.

The 25-year-old has been a revelation since stepping up as Steve Smith's concussion substitute at Lord's in last year's Ashes series in England. In the



Marnus Labuschagne

subsequent series against Pakistan and New Zealand, the right-hander smashed four centuries in five tests, including a maiden double hundred in Sydney earlier this year.

Labuschagne felt his Glamorgan stint helped him get better as a batsman and lamented not being able to reunite with the county as professional cricket remains suspended in England

until at least July 1. "I really enjoyed it last year. I loved Glamorgan, hence why I signed a two-year extension," he said. "It's disappointing to see them and England cricket in trouble. It's our responsibility, cricket on the whole, to make sure once this period is over that we get games on television and get the sport started again. We need to support each other." —Reuters

FIA warns against waging 'turf wars'

LONDON: Motor racing's world governing body has warned its various championships against waging 'turf wars' in rearranging their calendars once the COVID-19 pandemic subsides.

Formula One, the world rally and endurance championships and a swathe of other national and continental series are on hold and looking at cramming races into the second half of the year to complete their seasons.

That could lead to overlap and television scheduling clashes. "It's crucial that we prioritise the staging of events," International Automobile Federation (FIA) deputy president for sport Graham Stoker said in the latest edition of the body's journal AUTO.

"What would be counter-productive would be to get involved in turf wars. Let's not get involved in disputes about who has got which slot and what prior agreements might specify — that approach will not work."

"The main priority is (to) get motor sport going again and if that means some 'super weekends' with multiple events happening, in co-operation and with flexibility, well,

why not?" added the Briton. Formula One has yet to start a season that had been due to get under way in Australia on March 15.

It is hoping to schedule 15-18 races between July and December, starting in Austria and ending in Abu Dhabi. It has also cancelled the traditional three-week August factory shutdown to reschedule a string of postponed grands prix.

The Le Mans 24 Hours endurance race, which attracted a crowd of 252,000 last year to the French circuit, has been postponed from June 13-14 to Sept. 19-20 — a weekend which does not currently clash with F1.

Stoker said it was important to get grassroots events, "the lifeblood of competition", and national series up and running to rebuild confidence. He said the re-emergence of motorsport after both World Wars was driven by a grassroots desire to compete and it may be necessary to start from the bottom up again in a difficult financial landscape with carmakers suffering a slump in sales.

"Motor sport has got to pull together, and we've got to have flexibility in terms of events and venues and thinking outside the box in order to get things going again in a spectacular way that will obviously attract public interest," said Stoker.

"We should also demonstrate that motor sport remains relevant and a positive influence, through its messaging and actions." —Reuters

Sports

Judge rules against US women's soccer team in equal pay case

US women left stunned by their defeat on pay issue

LOS ANGELES: A federal judge dismissed the United States women's soccer team's bid for equal pay on Friday, rejecting claims the players had been underpaid in a crushing defeat for the reigning world champions.

In a 32-page ruling, Judge Gary Klausner of the US District Court for Central California in Los Angeles tossed the women's claim of pay discrimination, ruling in favour of the United States Soccer Federation (USSF).

Klausner did allow the women's case for unfair treatment in areas such as travel, housing and medical support to proceed to trial, set for June 16 in Los Angeles.

But the judge said the equal pay claims — the central plank of the case — had been dismissed because there was evidence the women had previously turned down an offer in the Collective Bargaining Agreement negotiations to be paid along the lines of the US men's team. "The history of negotiations between the parties demonstrates that the WNT rejected an offer to be paid under the same pay-to-play structure as the MNT, and the WNT was willing to forgo higher bonuses for benefits, such as greater base compensation and the guarantee of a higher number of contracted players," Klausner wrote.

"Accordingly, plaintiffs cannot now retroactively deem their CBA (collective bargaining agreement) worse than the MNT CBA by reference to what they would have made had they been paid under the MNT's pay-to-play terms structure when they themselves rejected such a structure," he said.

SHOCKED AND DISAPPOINTED

The US women were left stunned by their defeat on the pay issue. The women had been seeking back pay of \$66 million under the Equal Pay Act. Promi-

nent US women's team star Megan Rapinoe said after learning of the court's decision that the battle is not over.

"We will never stop fighting for EQUALITY," she wrote on Twitter. A spokeswoman for the players reacted with dismay following Friday's ruling. "We are shocked and disappointed with today's decision, but we will not give up our hard work for equal pay," spokeswoman Molly Levinson said.

"We are confident in our case and steadfast in our commitment to ensuring that girls and women who play this sport will not be valued as lesser just because of their gender. "We have learned that there are tremendous obstacles to change; we know that it takes bravery and courage and perseverance to stand up to them."

Fighting for equality

USSF said Friday night it would continue to work with the women's program to grow the game in the United States. "We look forward to working with the Women's National Team to chart a positive path forward and to grow the game both here at home and around the world," it said.

"We are committed to continuing that work to ensure our Women's National Team remains the best in the world." The increasingly acrimonious lawsuit had taken a dramatic turn in March, when a filing by lawyers for the federation argued that US men's team players required a "higher level of skill based on speed and strength" than the women.

The filing triggered outrage amongst the women's players while influential sponsors such as Coca-Cola voiced disgust at the remarks. USSF President Carlos Cordeiro later resigned following the uproar, with Rapinoe accusing the USSF of "blatant sexism" in its legal filings. The US women, who clinched back-to-back World Cup wins with victory at last year's finals in France, had based their claim for back pay in the disparities between prize money distributed by FIFA



PARIS: File photo shows US players pose ahead of the France 2019 Women's World Cup quarter-final football match between France and USA, at the Parc des Princes stadium in Paris. A federal judge dismissed the United States women's soccer team's bid for equal pay on May 1, 2020, rejecting claims the players had been underpaid in a crushing defeat for the reigning world champions. — AFP

at the men's and women's World Cups. Germany's men won \$35 million for their victory in the 2014 World Cup while France earned \$38 million after triumphing in Russia in 2018. The United States women, victors in the 2015 and 2019 World Cups, earned total prize money of \$6 million over the two tournaments.

The USSF argued in court that between the years 2015-2019, the women actually were paid more

money than the men on both a cumulative and an average per game basis.

During that period the women's national team received \$24 million and an average of \$220,747 per game while the men's team received payments of \$18 million and \$212,639 per game. Under the current CBA, which was signed in 2017, more than half the women's team players receive an annual base salary of \$167,000. — AFP

Caslavska, only gymnast to win all-around title

PRAGUE: When Vera Caslavka bowed her head and turned away in protest at the Soviet anthem during the 1968 Olympics, the Czech gymnast cemented her place as not only one of the country's greatest athletes but also as a powerful voice against Communist rule.

Two months after Warsaw Pact tanks swept into Czechoslovakia to crush the "Prague Spring" reforms, the anti-Soviet icon dazzled at the Mexico Games, claiming four golds and becoming one of only two women to win successive titles in the all-around competition. Yet it was her silent moment of defiance as the anthem played during the medal ceremony for the floor exercise, when she controversially shared a joint gold with a Soviet athlete after the judges upgraded the preliminary scores of her rival, that endeared her to Czechs.

It also made her a beloved figure long after her sporting career had ended. "We Olympians were the only ones who could demonstrate our attitude to the Soviet occupation to the world at that time of occupation," Caslavka said in a 2007 interview with iDNES.cz. All together, Caslavka took seven golds in her two Olympic Games, including back-to-back wins in the vault. She also won the beam at Tokyo 1964 and the uneven bars in 1968.

Caslavska, who began her sporting career as a figure skater, was also the first and only gymnast to win an all-around title at an

Olympic Games before winning it at the World Championships, European Championships and ensuing Olympics.

Her main rival in Tokyo, Ukrainian-born Larisa Latynina, was the only other female gymnast to win successive golds in the all-around competition, in 1956 and 1960. "She was a phenomenal sportswoman," Latynina told Reuters after Caslavka died in 2016 from pancreatic cancer. "Vera and I were friends and we would give each other presents. We would also swap vinyl records."

Czech authorities, however, nearly stopped Caslavka's journey to Mexico City in its tracks after she publicly opposed Soviet rule by signing a dissident manifesto in the spring of 1968.

Forced to hide in the mountains to avoid arrest, the gymnast only gained permission to compete at the last minute.

POTATO SACKS

During her time in hiding, she lifted potato sacks to keep fit and substituted logs for beams to prepare for the games where her dominant performances and decision to use the Mexican Hat Dance as music for one of her routines won the adoration of the local fans. Caslavka topped off her remarkable Olympics by marrying Czech 1,500 metres champion Josef Odlozil in Mexico City, 24 hours after her competition ended, in an event that drew thousands of well wishers.

Yet her triumph abroad did not translate into a warm welcome at home.

Caslavska was expelled from the Czech sports union and ostracised for criticising the 1968 invasion and refusing to withdraw her signature from the Prague Spring protest movement's "Manifesto of 2000 Words."

From 1974 she trained other gymnasts at home and also during a spell in Mexico. Czechs later voted her as the nation's sec-



Vera Caslavka

ond-greatest athlete after runner Emil Zatopek. When Communist rule ended in Czechoslovakia in 1989, President Vaclav Havel appointed her his adviser for sport and social issues. She also led the Czech Olympic Committee from 1990 to 1996. Her personal life following the country's "Velvet Revolution" that ended authoritarian rule in 1989 was not easy.

In 1993 her then ex-husband Odlozil died from injuries suffered in a fall after he was struck by their son Martin during a dispute.

In later years, Caslavka fell into a deep depression but overcame the illness and returned to public life, coaching gymnasts and serving as a mentor to younger Olympians. She was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in 2015 and died the following summer. — Reuters

Coronavirus US sport shutdown will cost \$12bn

NEW YORK: The \$100 billion US sports landscape will lose \$12 billion in revenue due to the coronavirus shutdown, ESPN reported Friday, with deeper cuts if NFL and college gridiron games are wiped out.

Analysis of the magnitude of business losses includes superstar salaries to pay for stadium workers but it might be a conservative estimate because it does not include outdoor recreational sport, gambling or such individual sports as golf, tennis and NASCAR, the most popular form of US auto racing.

Patrick Rishé, sports business program director at Washington University in St. Louis, estimated the impact of the shutdown on major US pro and college sports leagues as well as youth sport for ESPN, which also had labor market analysis firm Emsi make sport-related job estimates.

Rishé estimated US pro sports would lose \$5.5 billion from the shutdown while college sports would lose \$3.9 billion and youth sport tourism would fall by \$2.4 billion.

And those figures assume Major League Baseball and Major League Soccer can finish half of their sched-

uled seasons with spectators while the NBA and the National Hockey League cancel the unfinished part of their regular seasons and stage playoff games without spectators with youth sports resuming in July.

None of that is assured given the stay-at-home orders remaining in place over most of the nation as a result of the deadly virus that has killed more than 63,000 people in the United States and infected more than one million.

"As an economist, you stand back, you look at the carnage that's taking place — dumbfounded, awestruck, mind-numbing. All of those phrases, they're all relevant because we just have never seen anything on this scale," Rishé told ESPN.

Figures include \$3.25 billion that would have been spent by spectators on pro sports plus \$371 million of income for stadium and arena workers and \$2.2 billion in US television rights fees.

An NFL wipe out would cost more than \$11.5 billion in television revenue while 65 major collegiate American football programs receive about \$4 billion in TV money, about half the income that finances all athletic department budgets.

There are three million jobs nationwide that depend upon sports, from ushers and guards to scouts and trainers, according to the report.

Rishé said that should MLB play without spectators for half a season for its 162-games-a-team schedule, over \$2 billion more in game-day fan spending would be lost. — AFP

Beckham, one of the so-called 'Class of 92'

LONDON: When an 11-year-old David Beckham walked into a local newspaper office in east London with his mother in 1986 the trainee reporter summoned to reception could never have known he was about to meet a future international football and cultural icon.

Speaking in barely a whisper, the blonde-haired schoolboy, prompted by mum Sandra, said he had won the Bobby Charlton Soccer Schools skills competition and a trip to train with Barcelona, then managed by Terry Venables.

A story went out, one of a multitude that in years to come would chronicle a Roy of the Rovers tale that took the son of a plumber to fame and fortune beyond his wildest dreams. Six years later, Beckham fulfilled his childhood ambition by making his first-team debut for Manches-

ter United before going on to captain his country and become a Galactico at Real Madrid.

Beckham, one of the so-called "Class of 92", went on to win six Premier League titles under Alex Ferguson at United alongside youth-team buddies Ryan Giggs, Paul Scholes, Nicky Butt, and Gary and Phil Neville. Beckham also won two FA Cups and, memorably, the Champions League in 1999. He topped up his trophy collection with a La Liga winners' medal for Real Madrid and added two MLS Cups during a north American adventure with LA Galaxy.

That barely begins to tell the story, though. Midfielder Beckham, widely regarded as one of the sweetest strikers of a football in English soccer history, was destined for more than the sports pages.

In 1999, he married one of the Spice Girls, a British pop music sensation at the time, becoming one half of the country's new Golden Couple. Instead of "just" being a key cog in Manchester United's dominant team of the 1990s and early 2000s, he became a brand, as big a name off the pitch as on it.

High-end companies fell over them-

selves to sign Beckham up. On billboards around the world, he modelled everything from expensive underpants to watches and sunglasses.

Actors Tom Cruise and George Clooney became pals and even Prince Harry was keen to socialise with soccer royalty. "Bend it Like Beckham" became a box-office smash and Beckham was even credited with winning London's bid to host the 2012 Olympics, his charm helping sway the IOC vote.

Even after his playing days, father-of-four Beckham is rarely out of the news. He part owns new MLS franchise Inter Miami as well as Salford City. The door to all that, and an estimated net worth of \$450 million, was opened by football gifts.

Venables recalled meeting that boyish Beckham at Barcelona's Nou Camp. "As we said goodbye I made sure I would not forget his name," he said.

Had his grandfather got his way, Beckham would have signed for Tottenham Hotspur, then managed by Venables. The forms were already printed out, but Beckham only had eyes for United. After helping them win the FA Youth Cup in 1992, Beckham made his first-team debut

months later in the League Cup.

He returned from a brief loan spell at Preston to ignite his Old Trafford career, making his Premier League debut in 1994.

RAISED EYEBROWS

Ferguson's decision to give his "fledglings" their wings at the start of the 1995-96 season initially raised eyebrows. Pundit Alan Hansen famously quipped "you'll never win anything with kids," after an opening-day loss to Aston Villa.

Instead, with Beckham flowering as United's right-side midfielder, they scooped the Premier League and FA Cup double. On the first day of the next season, Beckham launched a 60-metre shot from inside his own half over Wimbledon goalkeeper Neil Sullivan and the world sat up and took notice.

Weeks later Glenn Hoddle handed him his England debut and he went on to earn 115 caps. From 2000 to 2006 he was captain. Beckham's celebrity status infuriated some, straining his relationship with Ferguson so much that the fiery Scot famously threw a boot at him in 2003 and cut his eye. When he was red-carded for kicking Argentina's Diego Simeone in the

last 16 of the 1998 World Cup, fans and media lambasted Beckham for the defeat. A Beckham effigy was strung up outside a London pub, such was the venom aimed his way.

Yet out of adversity, Beckham grew. He led England to a famous 5-1 win over Germany in a World Cup qualifier in 2001 and his metamorphosis from villain to hero was complete when he curled in a trademark free kick against Greece at Wembley to clinch a place in the 2002 tournament.

Although England's so-called "Golden Generation" never managed to land a trophy, Beckham went past Bobby Moore's appearance record for an outfield player in 2009 before injury ended his hopes of playing at the 2010 World Cup and his international career.

Post-United Beckham never quite scaled the same heights at club level. When he joined Real Madrid in 2003, 500 journalists turned up for his unveiling at the Bernabeu. It was not until his final season in 2006-07, however, that Real won La Liga, by which time the Beckham circus was plotting a course for LA Galaxy and the Hollywood stage his fairytale career demanded. — Reuters

18 National Rugby League steps toward return as Warriors cleared to land



19 Judge rules against US women's soccer team in equal pay case



19 Caslavka, only gymnast to win all-around title



HAVANA: This combination of pictures created on April 24, 2020 shows Cuban martial arts expert Alejandro Lopez, dancer Adrian Sanchez, Greco-Roman wrestler Daniel Gregorich and modern pentathlete Leydi Laura Moya training in their rooftops in Havana. — AFP

Athletes cling to their dreams on rooftops

HAVANA: These are hot, humid days in Havana. When the afternoon breeze sweeps in off the sea, William Roblejo steps onto the roof of his building, draws his bow across the strings of his violin, and runs through his repertoire of music to soothe an anxious city.

Access to a rooftop and a breeze is a coveted luxury in the Cuban capital, areas of which have been in lockdown over the coronavirus pandemic for several weeks. On other Havana rooftops, the country's top ballet dancer rolls out a mat and runs through his positions and pirouettes, an Olympic pentathlete lunges at an imaginary rival with an epee, and a Greco-Roman wrestling champion pumps iron.

Cuba has imposed lockdowns only in certain barrios, but the government has called on people to stay home as the number of confirmed infections climbed above 1,500 this week with 64 deaths.

With temperatures exceeding 30 degrees Celsius, water shortages in some areas of the capital and long lines at food stores, Cubans have grown more anxious under weeks of confinement.

Adrian Sanchez, first soloist at the National Ballet

of Cuba, fears above all that his muscles and his posture, used to a daily nine-hour training regime, will atrophy. "When all this is over we have to return to the ballet, and if we come back untrained, that will be very hard," said Sanchez, 22.

He practices "two or three hours" a day on the roof of his building, reached through a skylight and overlooking the iconic Revolution Square. "That way the time goes by faster, and I don't feel I'm being locked up so long," he says. Like everyone else, a good part of his day is spent queuing up for food.

MAKING DO

After decades of living under a US blockade, Cubans are adept at making do, even under the most difficult of circumstances — not least their athletes and performers who now have to find a way to pursue

their dreams during the uncertainty fueled by the pandemic.

Leydi Moya pulls out her epee to practice her fencing as part of her preparations for the next Olympic pentathlon event, whenever that may be.

Moya, youth Olympic champion in Singapore 2020 and triple-medallist at the Panamerican Games in Lima last year, was returning from a training camp in Mexico when the pandemic hit the region.

She knows that the makeshift training regimen she is reduced to at home is a far cry from Olympic-standard fitness training.

"Performance is going to drop," she admits. It's a similar situation for Daniel Gregorich, a Panamerican champion in Greco-Roman wrestling at his 87 kg weight level, who made Cuba's Olympic team at a recent qualifying event in Ottawa, Canada.

Humid days in Havana



NBA 2K releases schedule for first six weeks

LOS ANGELES: The NBA 2K League will tip off its delayed season on Tuesday, with 2019 finalist 76ers GC competing in one of the four opening-night matchups. Raptors Uprising GC will take on 76ers GC, and Cavs Legion GC will oppose Pacers Gaming in the first matches at 7 p.m. ET on Tuesday.

Two hours later, an all-Northern California matchup will see Kings Guard Gaming oppose Warriors Gaming Squad, and Mavs Gaming will meet Hawks Talon GC. The NBA 2K League season had been scheduled to start March 24, but the slate was postponed indefinitely on March 12 due to the coro-

navirus pandemic. The regular season will now begin with six weeks of online action that will see 23 teams play eight total matches from their home markets. Each match will be a best-of-three, and the outcome of each three-game series will count as one win or one loss in the standings.

All schedules are set through June 12, with the league saying it will announce the remainder of the schedule, including in-season tournament details, at a later date. The second week of play will be highlighted by a May 15 rematch of last year's best-of-five finals that saw T-Wolves Gaming edge the 76ers 3-2.

"Our team is ready to get season three started," 76ers GC head coach Jeff Terrell said in a statement Friday. "Competing in our home market provides a unique circumstance which is special to us. We are representing Philadelphia from Philadelphia. We have so much love and respect for our fans, so having the opportunity to stay home and compete in the league that we love is incredible."

"Our schedule excites us — and while we approach each game a week at a time, we all have the game against the T-Wolves circled on our calendar." Hawks Talon GC head coach Wesley Acuff said in a statement. "We are excited for the regular season. We are ready to play against the elite competition in this league and provide our city a sports team they can cheer for during this difficult time."

Zach Leonsis, the senior vice president of strategic initiatives for Monumental Sports & Entertainment & GM of Monumental Sports Network, the parent of Wizards District Gaming, said in a statement. "We are thrilled to finally announce our live game schedule for the first six weeks of play of the NBA 2K League regular season."

"At Monumental, we aim to deliver best-in-class live experiences, compete for championships in every sport we play, and support our great community in the District of Columbia, Virginia, and Maryland. We are excited to compete for a playoff spot and make our community proud."

"Sport is health, sport is life and at least it calms my anxiety," the 23-year-old said between sessions of lifting weights and doing push-ups.

A LITTLE GRATITUDE

Roblejo, the musician, is at times frustrated by not having his usual concert audience because "musicians are used to delivering art live." But he is also grateful for some of the quarantine's gifts as he plays on his rooftop above the deserted barrio of Playa, where the lulling sounds of the sea are more noticeable now there is no traffic.

"I have to thank this quarantine a little bit, because I studied a bit more and I think I've advanced in my music. Now I want this to be over so that I can show it," said Roblejo, head of the string section of Havana's Conservatory. In many ways, he admits to being "very happy. I've been locked up and playing alone at home for 20 or 25 days now." Psychologist Patricia Ares, writing in Granma, the daily of the ruling Communist Party, said "all of us will have to learn to live with adversity. We cannot avoid the wind, but we can build windmills." — AFP

Wizards District Gaming, who topped T-Wolves Gaming in the final of the NBA 2K League's Spring 16 exhibition tournament last month, will open their season Wednesday against the Raptors at 9 p.m. ET. At the same time, the Cavs will square off with Hornets Venom GC, one of the NBA 2K League's two expansion teams.

On Wednesday at 7 pm ET, Pacers Gaming will play against Heat Check Gaming, and Magic Gaming will battle Bucks Gaming. The T-Wolves begin their slate Thursday vs. the Hawks at 7 p.m. ET. That match will run concurrently with the Mavs vs. the Heat. At 9 p.m. on Thursday, the Kings will oppose Lakers Gaming, and the Warriors will face one of the other expansion team, the Gen.G Tigers of Shanghai.

The Week 1 slate concludes with four matches on May 8: 76ers-Hornets, Bucks-T-Wolves and Lakers-Gen.G, all at 7 p.m. ET; then Wizards-Magic at 9:30 p.m. ET. All NBA 2K League matches will be available for viewing on the league's Twitch and YouTube channels. — Reuters