



3 Respirators, protective gear arrive in Kuwait from China



14 Shah Rukh Khan, Will Smith in glittery India virus benefit



15 Jordanians showcase 'talent from home' for hit contest



Ramadan KAREEM

Imsak	03:26
Fajr	03:36
Dhuhr	11:45
Asr	15:20
Maghrib	18:26
Isha	19:51



Kuwait police use tear gas to disperse Egyptians in camps

Egyptians to leave this week • Clampdown on visa traders • Citizen sent to quarantine



KUWAIT: A COVID-19 drive-thru testing center is being readied near the airport. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Kuwait riot police used teargas to disperse hundreds of stranded Egyptian workers who demonstrated inside their temporary shelters to press their embassy officials to repatriate them. The violence broke out at Kabd shelters when the workers, waiting for more than three weeks to be repatriated, marched at the camp's gates shouting slogans that they wanted to go home.

Riots later broke out at another shelter in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh. About 7,000 Egyptian workers have been housed at the shelters since early April after they applied to benefit from an amnesty for illegal residents, but the Egyptian government refused to take them back although Kuwait will bear the repatriation costs. Images posted on the social media by the workers showed them marching on the gates, shouting slogans like "where is the embassy" and "we want to go home".

Some of the workers said they registered for the amnesty with the impression that they will be sent home quickly, but instead they have been living in these shelters for over 25

days. Kuwait has pressed the Egyptian and other governments hard to repatriate their nationals, but nothing has happened, which has frustrated the workers. The interior ministry said in a statement that security men brought the shelter back under control and ended the riots. It said that some workers have been arrested but did not say if any of them was wounded.

The statement said representatives of the Egyptian embassy arrived at the scene and told their citizens that flights to repatriate them back home will start this week. The Egyptian embassy expressed its apology for the riots, the statements said. The ministry called on the workers to remain quiet and warned that it will deal promptly with rioters. Interior Minister Anas Al-Saleh visited the site and praised the police force for what they did to ensure security.

The violence broke out hours after Egyptian Ambassador to Kuwait Tareq Al-Qooni announced that repatriation flights will start this week to take residence violators back home and that the first flights will be for women and children.

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Europe emerges from lockdown; cases top 3.5m

ROME: Millions of Europeans emerged from lockdown yesterday, with hardest-hit Italy leading the way out of its two-month coronavirus confinement. At least 3.5 million people are now known to have been infected by the disease, but US President Donald Trump offered hope for an end to the nightmare, saying there would be a vaccine by year's end.

Around 248,000 people have died since the coronavirus emerged in China late last year and swept across the globe, given wings by the vast network of air routes that in normal times keep the modern world

ticking. Lockdowns imposed on half of the planet in a bid to stem the spread have derailed economies and left tens of millions of people out of work.

Politicians are now grappling with how to get the wheels turning again without sparking a second wave of infections. Italy - second only to the United States in its COVID-19 death toll - was gingerly emerging into the spring sunshine yesterday, with construction sites and factories getting back to work.

Restaurants reopened for takeaways, but bars and ice cream parlours will remain shut. The use of public transport is being discouraged and everyone will have to wear masks in indoor public spaces. "We are feeling a mix of joy and fear," 40-year-old Stefano Milano said in Rome. "There will be great happiness in being able to go running again carefree, in my son being allowed to have his little cousin over to

blow out his birthday candles, to see our parents," the father-of-three said.

Italy's economy - the eurozone's third-largest - is expected to shrink more than in any year since the global depression of the 1930s. The previously booming economy in the United States was supposed to be the centerpiece of Donald Trump's November re-election bid. But weeks of lockdown have left 30 million Americans out of work - and the president's poll numbers sagging. Trump has increasingly taken to blaming China for the outbreak, and says there is proof it started in a Chinese laboratory.

China denies the claims, and the US Director of National Intelligence has said analysts are still examining the exact origin. Most scientists say the disease arose naturally in the animal kingdom. But Trump's chief diplomat on Sunday ran with his boss's position, citing "enormous" evidence

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MILAN: Commuters sit in the metro where red circles on the ground indicate where to stand to maintain distance between people yesterday, as Italy starts to ease its lockdown. — AFP

US: 'Evidence' virus came from China lab

WASHINGTON: Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Sunday stepped up a US campaign to hold China accountable for the spread of the deadly coronavirus, asserting there is "enormous evidence" the virus originated in a laboratory in the city of Wuhan. The high-security bio-containment facility, the Wuhan Institute of Virology, has called such claims "impossible". Pompeo, speaking on ABC's "This Week," did not elaborate on what he also described as "significant amounts of evidence". But Pompeo's words clearly sought to buttress repeated criticism from Donald Trump about China's role in the pandemic.

The US president has said that by playing down the gravity of the virus early this year and failing to fully cooperate with international investigators, Beijing put lives at risk around the world. Pompeo's comments came as an

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WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump speaks during a Fox News virtual town hall "America Together: Returning to Work," event with anchors Bret Baier and Martha MacCallum from the Lincoln Memorial on Sunday. — AFP

Trump promises vaccine, sees an 'incredible' future

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump relaunched his election campaign Sunday with a live television event inside the iconic Lincoln Memorial, promising an early coronavirus vaccine and urging Americans to put the pandemic behind them to embrace an "incredible" future. With the two-hour long Fox News "town hall," Trump sought to wrap himself in the mantle of America's arguably greatest president - and to persuade a nation battered by death and mass unemployment to look ahead.

"We can't stay closed as a country, we're not going to have a country left," he said on the show, where two moderators, as well as ordinary citizens via video, put questions to him in front of the monument. "We're going to have an incredible following year," he said. To a woman who called in expressing fear of financial ruin and eviction, Trump said her job would come back. "You get a job where you make more money," he said.

Saying Americans should start going back to beaches this summer and recommending that

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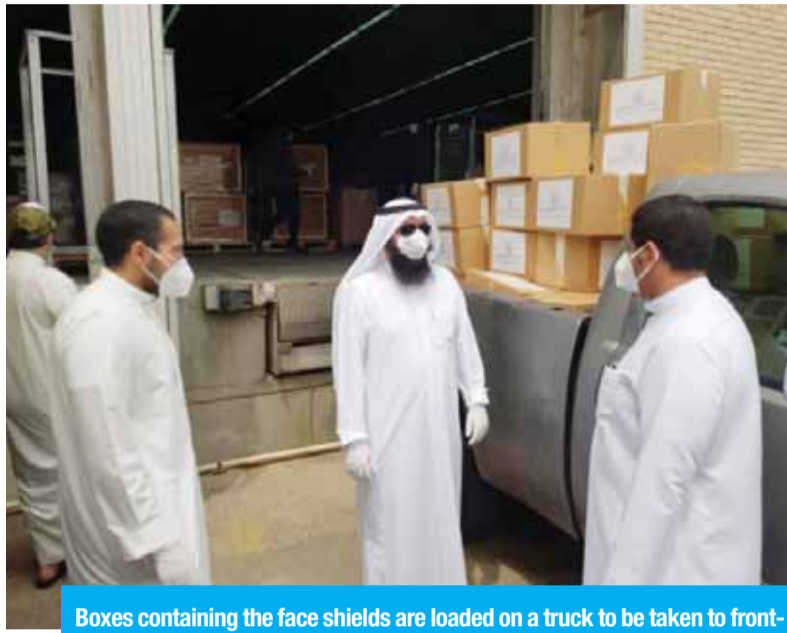
Local

Engineers society offers 40,000 face shields to COVID-19 frontliners

Thirty-nine state departments received transparent masks



Chairman of Kuwait Society of Engineers Faisal Al-Atel (second from right) with police officers during the handover of the protective masks. — KUNA photos



Boxes containing the face shields are loaded on a truck to be taken to front-line workers.



KUWAIT: Face shields distributed by Kuwait Society of Engineers to workers at the frontlines.

KUWAIT: Chairman of Kuwait Society of Engineers (KSE) Faisal Al-Atel said the society has made nearly 40,000 face shields that will be offered for free to frontline workers fighting the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). "Thirty-nine state departments have received these transparent masks and will distribute them to the working teams soon," he said yesterday. "These include the ministries of health and interior,

the National Guard, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), the Special Forces, the Environment Public Authority, the Public Authority of Manpower, Kuwait General Administration of Customs and the Fire Service Directorate."

"Nearly 84 service centers belonging to the Ministry of Health and the Armed Forces also received consignments of these masks," Atel pointed out. KSE

has opened new production lines in collaboration with the engineering department of the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research and the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET). The society started producing more practical facemasks and other personal protection items, Atel noted.

On cooperation with the government, the KSE chair said the cabinet responded promptly to the

KSE request for allocating three quarantine sites. The three sites, with a 300-person occupancy each, were fully equipped and one of them went operational, he stated. Atel added that the KSE set up teams of volunteers comprising of more than 200 male and female engineers to back up the various government bodies in managing any emergencies. — KUNA

UN commends Kuwait's work against COVID-19 rumors

KUWAIT: UN Secretary-General Representative Tarek Al-Sheikh Sunday commended Kuwait's Information Ministry for relentlessly working against rumors amidst spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). Sheikh, also Resident Coordinator in Kuwait, said the ministry's "Tahaqqaq" platform - <https://tahaqqaq.media.gov.kw> - reflected determination to fighting rumors and misleading information re-

lated to the virus. Sheikh made the remarks in a statement marking the World Press Freedom Day which was celebrated by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) under the motto: Journalism Without Fear of Favor. The government of Kuwait, he said, has always called on individuals to seek information from reliable sources. In a sign of seriousness, he added, the government took legal action against rumor-mongers. "Spreading of rumors has negative impacts in these difficult times," said Sheikh, and this would undermine society's morale and the government's ability to overcome "dangerous health challenges," as well as spreading panic and fear amongst people.

Anna Paolini, Director of UNESCO's Representative in the Arab Gulf States and Yemen, underlined important role of the press in the fight against the

coronavirus. The pandemic reminds "us that we cannot face these difficult times unless we work together to boost a suitable environment that respect diversity, mutual understanding and free flow of information for all," she said. Therefore, said Paolini, there was a need for professional journalists who would help the society confront misinformation and hatred. UNESCO, said Paolini, provided a series of publications and materials for all journalists, volunteers and students to support their quest in the fight against COVID-19, which were reachable through: <https://en.unesco.org/covid19>. An online event was scheduled to be held yesterday, she said, bringing together UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, UN officials and international journalists to discuss freedom of press. UN General Assembly set in 1993 May 3 as the World Press Day. — KUNA

Coronavirus in Kuwait: What we know so far

KUWAIT: Kuwait has recorded 4,983 cases infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) as of Sunday, in addition to 38 deaths. With the exception of 72 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, 1,947 people have recovered completely after previously being infected with the virus, while there are 2,998 people receiving treatment and 3,927 quarantined as of yesterday. Kuwait is taking measures to test Kuwaitis coming from infected areas for potential infection, as it has already tested thousands of people.

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 quarantine for 14 days, during which the person is monitored, and prescribed health procedures are applied, the health ministry said. Kuwait had required 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. 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. 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.

Kuwait suspended issuing entry permits and visas unless those issued through diplomatic missions. The Interior Ministry issued an amnesty allowing 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. The amnesty was issued in view of the circumstances the country is currently going through and as part of the precautionary measures taken to fight the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). During the amnesty period, individuals desiring to procure valid residencies in Kuwait and were willing to pay the fines without being subjected to investigations were allowed to pay the fines and legalize their status if they meet the required conditions.

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 (Ilawally 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-Khaldi (head of this team):** daily 9:00 am - 12:00 pm. Call 9903-6470.
 - **Dr Ahmad Al-Khaldi:** 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.

Wellbeing Amidst the Pandemic

The global pain of exclusion

By Sadie Hussain

As the coronavirus pandemic intensifies, governments worldwide have placed their citizens into various forms of quarantine. For the first time, the world is faced with the feelings of isolation from society. For many this detachment is not a temporary phase, but everyday life.

Nearly 1.3 billion people live with disabilities (PWD) worldwide. Disability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way should diminish one's right to fully participate in all aspects of community. With masses having now experienced the feelings of isolation, we cannot now escape the realities of this issue. Isolation and exclusion have very real impacts on mental and physical well-being. It can also affect quality of life.

The State of Kuwait, a regional pioneer, instituted disability awareness in its legal umbrella in 2010 and since the Public Authority for Disabled Affairs (PADA) has worked with the public, private and social sectors in delivering support to PWD: including working with the UNDP in Kuwait in formulating accessibility infrastructure and guides necessary to reach the goal of inclusion.

There are approximately 27,000 registered people with disabilities in Kuwait, yet the majority remain marginalized from the labor market. Despite this, some businesses are beginning to recognize the contribution and market value of PWD, today's modus operandi sustains the convincing moral and societal imperative that exclusion must end.

As the pandemic has demonstrated by forcing people to work from home, remote work is a viable and oftentimes, more productive possibility for employers. Many of the remote work practices implemented since the global pandemic started - including a shift to greater use of digital technologies and communication - are the same practices that allow PWD to not only participate, but prosper in the business world.

Today we are seeing the business world at its most responsive and agile state. The coronavirus pandemic has granted us a rare opportunity to recognize and leverage the value of persons with disability in the business world. We have the chance now to build on everything that we have learned and cultivate new systems and models that would be wholly inclusive.

In the post-pandemic global economy, businesses that failed to adapt will either fail or be redesigned. For the longest time, there has been the belief that world systems could not change. Today, amidst the pandemic we have proved that they can.

In building the future, we must not repeat mistakes of the past or the present, amongst which include neglecting the advantage of inclusion and taking into consideration the specific needs of PWD; an equally important part of our communities. We all now know the global pain of exclusion.

Local

Respirators, protective gear arrive in Kuwait from China

KD 5 million allocated to purchase required devices



KUWAIT: These pictures released by Kuwait's Ministry of Defense show a Kuwait Air Force plane landing in Kuwait with medical supplies from China.

KUWAIT: Kuwait Foundation for Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) announced Sunday arrival of respirators and personal protective gear that it has purchased from China for the Kuwaiti Ministry of Health. KFAS has purchased the medical devices and kits as part of its program of emergency response for stem-

ming spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). Dr Amani Al-Bedah, the deputy director general for back-up programs, said in a statement that the foundation bought and imported more than 170 respirators and a large amount of medical protective gear. More plane-loads of such equipment are expected in

the country during this week. Bedah said these equipment have been obtained for upgrading the national health system to treat critical conditions. KFAS has allotted KD 5 million (\$16.5 million) to purchase required devices, she said, adding that two plane-loads of such supplies would arrive in Kuwait next week to

equip "frontline personnel" helping in the combat against the contagion. KFAS's emergency response program, declared in middle of March, is one of the largest national programs for backing government effort — with an allocated budget of KD 10 million (\$33 million).



KUWAIT: A combination of photos showing food distribution to residents in Jeeb Al-Shuyoukh Sunday, which highlight the bad conditions that tens of thousands of people continue to live in inside the densely-populated area under nearly a month of lockdown.— Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh



News in brief

Kuwait, UK discuss COVID-19

KUWAIT: Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah received on Sunday a telephone contact from James Cleverly, the United Kingdom Minister of State for the Middle East and North Africa. The two sides, during the call, examined bilateral relations between the two friendly countries, regional and international issues namely efforts in the two countries for fighting the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

Worker tests positive

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources announced that one of its employees tested positive for coronavirus. The authority's building will be closed for a week as a precautionary measure.

Curfew permits

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Interior announced it will reduce permits allowing people to go out during the curfew hours by 50 percent. The ministry will review all permits and reconsider the necessary ones.

Suicide in Taima

KUWAIT: A 36-year-old bedoon man committed suicide by hanging in his house in Taima, according to preliminary investigations. According to a security source, his family transferred him to Jahra Hospital, but he died before reaching the hospital. The source told Al-Rai that police will investigate the circumstances of his death.

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed

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Kuwait Heritage



KUWAIT: An aerial view of Dasman Palace taken circa 1930, as Kuwait's wall can be seen in the background. Built by Sheikh Salem Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, Dasman Palace is considered one of the historic mansions in Kuwait, as it still maintains its original architecture. The palace is located on the Arabian Gulf Road near Kuwait Towers. (Source: 'Kuwait ..In Black and White,' by Basem Al-Loughani, Kuwait, 2008. Prepared by: Mahmoud Aakarfa Abu Alella, researcher in heritage, Ministry of Information)

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Inflation in Kuwait up 1.94% in March

KUWAIT: Inflation rate in Kuwait rose by 1.94 percent in March on yearly basis, the Central Statistical Bureau (CSB) said in its monthly report on Sunday. It noted that the inflation rate slightly surged by 0.09 in March compared with the previous month. Benchmark of the first group of commodities (food and beverages) climbed in March by 2.79 percent compared to the same month in 2019. Likewise, main index of the second group (tobacco and cigarettes), by 1.3 percent year-on-year. Index of clothing increased 2.84 percent, annually, while housing services dropped 0.17 percent y-o-y. Inflation in the fifth group (home furniture) moved up by 2.86 percent y-o-y, in health by 2.23 percent, and transports by 3.55 percent. Index of Communications also increased, 4.09 percent on annual basis, entertainment and culture, 3.20 percent, and education, 2.8 percent y-o-y. Sector of restaurants and hotels climbed by 1.32 percent y-o-y, as well as commodities and diverse services, 4.01 percent y-o-y. The benchmark of consumer prices is a tool to measure prices in general, either on monthly or yearly basis. It is also used to measure growth or economic recession, where the state takes it into consideration when making decisions regarding economic, commercial sectors and mapping out monetary and financial policies. — KUNA

Kuwait Business Council signs deal with UAE ministry

DUBAI: Kuwait Business Council in Dubai announced on Sunday inking an agreement with the UAE Ministry of Economy to be a main and strategic partner in the Annual Investment Forum. The council said in a statement partnership with the ministry was in line with the approach to boost Kuwaiti business presence in the UAE, attain economic integration and strategic cooperation between Kuwait and Abu Dhabi. The council will organize a competition for emerging Kuwaiti enterprises for representing Kuwait at the forum, which groups more than 80 countries. It is also a platform for promoting Kuwaiti small and medium enterprises and shedding light on potentials of the Kuwaiti private sector and motivating young Kuwaitis to make more achievements at the regional and international levels. The statement quoted head of the forum steering committee, Daoud Al-Shizawi, as saying that the Kuwaiti council participation in the next edition of the forum would be an added value to the annual event. Meanwhile, the council chairperson Badr Al-Saqabi expressed gratitude to the UAE ministry for the confidence accorded to the council. Feras Al-Salem, the deputy chairman, said winner of the competition will be given a pavilion at the event venue for three days to promote the venture, in addition to a \$50,000 reward. Moreover, the winner will be relieved of costs of travel and residence. Current edition of the forum was scheduled last March but it was delayed indefinitely due to the coronavirus outbreak. — KUNA

In my view

Myths turned scientific



By Abdellatif Sharaa

Local@kuwaittimes.net

Superstition has been present around the world for a long time, although societies may not agree on what is superstitious, which is bad, and what is not, which is good. An example of this is the owl, which is considered as good and brings luck in the West, contrary to the Middle East, where people believe the bird brings bad luck and is anything but good!

I received a message from a friend who is a doctor, in which he mentioned a few things like not to leave your shoes turned upside down, do not leave a pair of scissors open, do not sweep your home at night, choose a house that has a good looking doorstep, as our grandmothers said all along, although we considered all these as myths as we grew older. Yet the surprise is that most of it has scientific merit in it.

This is the principle that was adopted in the "energetic place" science. This science is a mixture of ancient civilizations' sciences. Arabs were first, as well as the Chinese, Indian and Pharaonic civilizations that were interested in studying the place, its energy and how to arrange things in the right place, because we as people are surrounded with energy paths. So when we put something in the wrong place, it may cause many problems without us realizing that. Our forefathers gave this science good attention whether they meant to do so or not. The Pharaohs used to live on the eastern side and bury their dead on the western side, as an example.

The doctor said his grandmother used to say that when we move to a new house, we must make sure its surroundings are clean, have plants around it and different colors. It was said that toilets should be placed in separate quarters because toilets have negative energy. They only cleaned their homes during the day and were very strict not to use the broom at night, as they believed the dust is attracted in the direction of the sun during the daylight, while at night they enter the lungs and cause problems!

The open pair of scissors breaks the halo of energy around our bodies and that is why they used to say keeping the scissors open for nothing brings bad thoughts and distemper. Another habit is throwing salt around the house during social events to keep negative energy away, and although it is considered a myth, it really has a scientific origin!

We may ridicule this, but it can be true because anything that is not good in the house may bring negative energy, such as keeping things without using them, placing mirrors in the bedroom and having lots of dark colors around, while the right thing is to choose bright and light colors to balance the dark ones, because dark colors make people in the house lazy, lethargic and restless. It is advised to have toilets towards the west, living rooms in areas where sunlight can enter and furniture in an east-southeast placement. Finally, make sure to have green plants around and ventilate the house very well.

Local

National Guard, Red Crescent distribute iftar in Mahboula



KUWAIT: Kuwait National Guard and Kuwait Red Crescent Society Sunday distributed iftar meals to residents of Mahboula, which has been under lockdown for nearly a month as part of state efforts to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). — Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh





Superheroes from 'near and far' join Indonesia fight

Iran guards accused of 'forcing Afghan migrants into river'



NICE: A crow sits on a signpost on a deserted beach in the French Riviera city of Nice, southern France on the 46th day of a lockdown in France aimed at curbing the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, the novel coronavirus. — AFP

Women facing risk of sex attacks

Absence of crowds made women easier targets in France

PARIS: For many women venturing out during France's coronavirus lockdown, the absence of crowds has made them easier targets for sexual assault and harassment, a threat that could increase as officials prepare to ease stay-at-home orders. Feminist advocacy groups are reporting an increase of incidents in broad daylight by aggressors who know their victims are unlikely to be able to summon help.

Fatima Benomar, a 36-year-old rights activist, said she was hounded by several youths on the Rue de Rivoli in Paris, a wide-open thoroughfare that has been emptied of cars and passers-by. "They came up because I was ignoring their catcalls, and started insulting and threatening me," Benomar told AFP. "It was incredibly scary."

"There wasn't any way to escape, all the stores were closed and there was nobody to ask for help," she said. For Laurene Martin, a 28-year-old nurse, the commute between Paris and a nearby suburb had never caused her alarm, until the lockdown was imposed on March 17. "On the second day of confinement, some guys jumped me in the Metro and stole my phone. I screamed and they ran off, but then the only other person in the train, a man, came up right next to me and asked if I was married," she said.

Other incidents since then convinced her to buy a bicycle to get to work. "It's certainly worse than before," Martin said. "There are fewer people to target, and fewer witnesses." Police, who have been urging

victims or witnesses to report any cases, have not released official figures on the number of assault reports during the lockdown. But prosecutors reported last week that two women were attacked in rare rapes in public spaces within 24 hours of each other—one in a park, the other on a street in Seine-Saint-Denis, just north of Paris.

'Strange atmosphere'

Geraldine Franck, a rights advocate in Paris, said she had tracked numerous accounts on social media by women harassed while trying to take advantage of their rare moments outside. "These moments have turned into an anguishing ordeal, and women quickly return home out of fear," she said. "Day is now just like night, for women there's no longer any difference."

That fear, "normally felt only at night," is shared by Daniella Corallo-Martin, 26, who said men had been harassing her daily on her Metro trips since mid-March. She has adopted a series of precautions for navigating "a strange atmosphere, lots of drifters, deranged people, the ones who normally are just part of the crowd. 'I keep my eyes open for anyone following me, and on the platform I always find someone to stand next to. I never get in a train that's almost empty, and I don't listen to any music,'" the migrant aid worker said.

Equality Minister Marlene Schiappa said Thursday that she was worried about "a real risk of increased



RHONE: Women of the Muslim faith, wearing a protective facemasks, go to the market in Givors near Lyon, on the 47th day of a strict lockdown in France. — AFP

sexual violence" from May 11, when the stay-at-home orders are set to be lifted across wide swathes of the country. She pointed to the risk of pent-up energy among aggressors along with "a sense of impunity" since streets are still expected to be thinned because

people will be working from home and outings will still be discouraged to ensure social distancing. Her ministry has set up a task force of experts to determine which measures will be taken to protect women once the lockdown begin to be lifted. —AFP

For Haitians, die of hunger today or virus tomorrow?

PORT-AU-PRINCE: When the novel coronavirus first appeared in Haiti authorities and humanitarian experts panicked, worried about the country's decrepit health system—but the pandemic's economic consequences could prove yet deadlier for the nation's poor. With just eight official virus fatalities as of Saturday, the COVID-19 pandemic is still in its infancy in Haiti, where staying at home and social distancing are unattainable luxuries for many who make their living in the informal economy.

In an attempt to stem the spread of the virus the government of Haiti—the poorest country in the Americas—announced that wearing a mask would be compulsory in all public places beginning May 11. Masks aside, for many Haitians the main question remains: Die of hunger today or coronavirus tomorrow?

On the hilltops east of Port-au-Prince, in the Petionville suburb, merchants took a stand for the latter option, protesting in the streets against a rule limiting their commercial activities to three days a week—a town hall directive mainly issued in vain. Consumer panic that followed the March 19 announcement that COVID-19 had arrived on Haitian shores has subsided, and customers are now making more measured purchases, particularly considering their often limited means.

Cereals constitute two-thirds of the daily caloric intake of the average poor Haitians. However the price of one such staple—rice—has more than doubled in some markets compared with 2019. Inflation has accelerated since

March, and the sharp rise in prices linked to the coronavirus pandemic will only worsen a recession which began about 1.5 years ago. "With the looming crisis, we expect a decline of almost four percent," of gross domestic product, Prime Minister Joseph Jouthe said during an annual finance summit held online this year.

Risk of famine

Half of all Haitian jobs are in agriculture, even though the sector accounts for only 21 percent of the country's GDP, according to Haitian economist Etzer Emile. Poor workers who own tiny farms watch their incomes melt away in the lean season between harvests, making preparations for the next harvest ever more difficult, especially in certain regions already threatened by drought. Long before the coronavirus pandemic crippled the global economy, the United Nations warned that 40 percent of Haitians would need emergency humanitarian assistance in 2020.

The estimate projected that starting in March nearly three million Haitians would be facing "severe food insecurity," a UN classification just below famine. Haiti's diaspora has long kept the country from plunging into even deeper poverty by sending money home: More than \$3 billion is transferred back to Haiti each year by those living abroad, totaling about a third of the nation's GDP, official figures show. "Haitians depend on remittances for food, education and even funerals," Haitian economist Kesner Pharel said.

However the diaspora, mainly based in the United States, is now facing a wave of massive unemployment sweeping the world's largest economy. Haiti's Ministry of Economy and Finance predicts that the financial aid will drop by almost a quarter in the coming months. "We like to say that when the American economy suffers from the flu, Haiti suffers from pneumonia: The millions of jobs lost in the United States will cause worsening extreme poverty for sure," Pharel said. —AFP

In historic first, US Supreme Court to be broadcast live

WASHINGTON: After a pause occasioned by the coronavirus, the US Supreme Court resumed hearing cases yesterday, but in a small revolution for the tradition-bound institution the justices participated from home, with live audio broadcast on radio and television. The move to greater transparency has been demanded for years in legal circles and was long ago adopted by many state and local courts; but for the Supreme Court, it took a pandemic to make it happen.

In normal times, the top US court meets in its stately neo-classical building directly across First Street from the US Capitol. Two hundred seats in its marble hearing room are reserved for members of the public, who often line up for hours outside the building's white-columned facade for the privilege of hearing the nine justices ponder issues that range from the arcane to the history-changing.

In the courtroom, electronic equipment is strictly banned, and journalists are not allowed to report on the justices' debates until their conclusion. Official recordings of the proceedings—audio only—are posted online only days later. Despite calls for reform, the court has always refused to allow microphones or cameras, saying it does not want to lend undue weight to hearings,

which justices say are often less decisive than the written arguments submitted by lawyers.

For the first time in history, several media outlets, including the Fox and C-Span networks, will broadcast live the exchanges between the justices, each still confined at home, and lawyers arguing cases. The pandemic has forced the nine justices—including progressive Ruth Bader Ginsburg, an octogenarian who has been in fragile health—to telework for nearly two months. During hearing, the justices will take part by telephone. But with no cameras involved, they won't have to wear their traditional black robes.

"Over my dead body," former justice David Souter once famously said about cameras in the courtroom. To avoid confusion, the justices will speak in order of their seniority on the court, rather than in their usual impromptu fashion. Television viewers will only see photos of the justices on the screen, above their names. The court has not said whether the bailiff will open the hearing with his traditional "Oyez, oyez, oyez" call for silence and attention.

The first case, to be heard starting at 10am, will deal with whether the popular travel site Booking.com is allowed to register its name as a trademark—or whether that would be barred by federal law banning the trademarking of generic terms. Over the coming two weeks, the court will hear arguments in nine other cases. The most highly anticipated, set for May 12, will deal with whether President Donald Trump's accountants and bankers can be compelled to turn over his financial records to Congress and New York prosecutors. Trump has fought to protect his tax records from public scrutiny. —AFP

International

Clamoring to get home, India migrant workers stone police

India's military salutes virus workers with rose petals, flypasts

AHMEDABAD: More than 2,000 rural migrant workers blocked from returning home pelted Indian police with stones, officials in Gujarat said, as millions more stranded in the state readied to return to villages. Poor migrant workers across the country lost their jobs during the world's biggest pandemic lockdown, which began in late March to guard against the spread of new coronavirus.

Saturday's clash in western India's Gujarat is the latest in a spate of such protests across India. It happened when officials stopped the workers, who had rented vehicles, from crossing into neighboring Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh states, because they did not have sufficient paperwork for entry, officials said.

Gujarat is one of India's main industrial hubs, and authorities there were bracing for a logistical "nightmare" after about two million migrant laborers and their families signed up for permission to return home, an official in the state said. They are clamoring to get back to their villages despite the fact that some might have the opportunity to work again. The government is pushing for factories to reopen and has eased some restrictions in the lockdown which will extend for two more weeks from Monday.

"Making arrangements for even half of the registered people would be a nightmare for the district administrations," the official, who asked to remain anonymous said. In Indore, in the central state of Madhya Pradesh, 14 migrant workers and four others were found by police on Saturday crammed into a cement mixer, local media reported. The migrants had been trying to return home from western Maharashtra state to northern Uttar Pradesh state—a

1,200-kilometre journey. In a vast exodus, many migrant already managed to return to their villages, mostly on foot, but local media reported that some died on their long journeys. Others have been stranded at crowded shelters in cities. The government late last week allowed special cross-border trains and buses to operate to bring those who wanted to return to their villages in other states. Inter-state public transport is still barred.

Military salutes workers

Meanwhile, helicopters showered masked health workers with rose petals and jets roared across the skies Sunday as India's military paid tribute to frontline workers battling the coronavirus pandemic. In one of the first of several gestures on Sunday, petals fell on to the upturned faces of medical personnel clad in protective gear while an army band played patriotic tunes including "Jai Ho" (May victory prevail) from the popular "Slumdog Millionaire" film.

In several states and territories across the vast nation of 1.3 billion people, fighter jets and transport aircraft in formations took part in low-flying aerial salutes to thank the country's so-called "corona warriors". "The entire nation stands united in these challenging times," Defense Minister Rajnath Singh tweeted Sunday. He praised the "commendable work" of the "frontline warriors", including police who have been enforcing the nationwide virus lockdown in place since late March. The navy lit up its ships off the sub-continent's shores when night fell, as part of the tributes.

The performances were the third public show of



GUJARAT: A health worker (right) checks the temperature of stranded migrant workers before they board on special busses to return to their hometowns during a government-imposed nationwide lockdown as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 coronavirus. — AFP

gratitude to health and other frontline workers, after Indians took part in nationwide clapping and lamp lighting efforts led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on previous Sundays.

The lockdown was extended for another two

weeks by the government on Friday, although some restrictions were lifted in regions that have lower numbers of virus cases. India has recorded almost 40,000 coronavirus cases, including 1,301 deaths. — Agencies

How coronavirus could bring cities closer to home

BARCELONA: In the once-bustling Eixample district, birdsong and the occasional whir of a food delivery cyclist have replaced the continuous din of passing traffic - making lockdown life unexpectedly bucolic in this Barcelona neighborhood. Lara Ocon, a local resident who works in marketing, said life has become more peaceful in the cosmopolitan district since Spain implemented strict social distancing orders on March 14 to stem the spread of the new coronavirus.

"I spend weekends sunbathing with a book ... there is something very enjoyable in a slower pace and more local lifestyle," Ocon said. Before the lockdown, she said, she had a busy social life and travelled abroad extensively for work - in January alone, she flew to Colombia, Iceland and the Netherlands. "This pause makes me think that, really, that lifestyle is absolutely crazy," she said. As city dwellers around the world are forced to stay closer to home, some architects are rethinking urban infrastructure to promote a more local lifestyle and help people adapt to a post-pandemic world.

Harm Timmermans, owner of Netherlands-based Shift architecture urbanism, said he was inspired by his own experience of shopping in Rotterdam when he came up with the concept of a pandemic-friendly 'Hyperlocal Micromarket'. "The first day of the Dutch shutdown, I went to the supermarket and I realised that they are the weakest link in terms of social distancing - the rules are very hard to keep there," he said over the phone.

But with local markets shut, many people had no choice but to brave the city's supermarkets, he noted. So, Timmermans created a simple 16-square grid design for a tiny marketplace that can be quickly and cheaply assembled in public squares, allowing people to shop local while also following social distancing guidelines. Each micromarket consists of just three stalls - each selling a different kind of produce - organized around the grid, which holds a maximum of six customers at a time.

The stalls have separate counters for orders and collection, and the marketplace has one entrance and two exits. "Friendly, smaller markets are needed in more points across cities and towns ... this could be applied to most Western societies," Timmermans stressed. Local markets can also be essential to the city's poorest - so they need to remain open even during pandemics, the architect noted. "In some places, markets are still cheaper than supermarkets. So, keeping markets accessible can help vulnerable groups," he said. The idea of organizing urban infrastructure around social distancing principles also underpins a new maze-like design for a crowd-free public park by Studio Precht, an architecture studio based in Austria. Their Parc de la Distance was conceived as a proposal for a vacant lot in Vienna but could be replicated on any unused patch of urban land, of any size, the architects said.

The paths in the park are 2.4 meters apart, with 90-cm hedges dividing them, allowing visitors to experience the benefits of green space while remaining at a safe physical distance. But it's not only public areas that could be reshaped by the impact of coronavirus. With many predicting that the pandemic will result in more people working from home even after lockdowns are lifted, the race is on to redesign domestic spaces. — Reuters

Young street doctor defies virus to help Belarus homeless

MINSK: For the past year-and-a-half medical student Karina Radchenko has provided free health care to the homeless in the Belarusian capital Minsk. Since the onset of the coronavirus outbreak she has seen a spike in the number of people needing her help. Many people who were eluding a living in the ex-Soviet country before the epidemic can no longer afford to purchase medicines or go to a doctor, said Radchenko.

Together with those sleeping rough on the streets some of them come to see her. "They are now forced to ask for help together with the homeless because there's nowhere else they can get it," Radchenko told AFP during one of her street rounds. The 28-year-old is the founder of "Street Medicine," the country's first volunteer project to



MINSK: A volunteer of the Street Medicine movement, wearing protective equipment, tends to the foot wound of a man as they provide medical care to homeless people in Minsk. — AFP

treat the homeless and needy. Pensioner Tatyana, who declined to give her last name, said she comes to see the volunteers "sometimes"-when she runs out of money. On a recent afternoon Radchenko distributed nonprescription medicines to her patients with the help of several fellow volunteers in a small park. She and her assistants wore visors and

gloves to protect themselves against the infections. An elderly woman turned up to have her blood pressure checked.

Another elderly woman received a surgical mask. A 30-year-old ex-convict had his temperature taken. Yury praised the volunteers for giving out medicines and masks. "There are many fatalities. People should not be dying," he said, declining to give his last name. Radchenko's team does not have testing kits to screen people for the coronavirus so all they can do is to watch out for the disease's telltale symptoms. "We pay special attention to people with signs of a respiratory infection," she said.

Belarus, which has a population of more than nine million people, has reported more than 16,700 coronavirus cases overtaking neighboring EU member Poland and ex-Soviet Ukraine. Ninety-nine people have died so far. The ex-Soviet country remains one of the few nations that did not impose lockdown measures. Its authoritarian leader Alexander Lukashenko has dismissed the contagion as a "psychosis" and plans to stage a military parade to mark victory over Nazi Germany next week. — AFP

Italy emerges from the world's longest lockdown

ROME: Stir-crazy Italians will be free to stroll and visit relatives for the first time in nine weeks on Monday as Europe's hardest-hit country eases back the world's longest nationwide coronavirus lockdown. Four million people-an estimated 72 percent of them men-will return to their construction sites and factories as the economically and emotionally shattered country tries to get back to work. Restaurants that have managed to survive Italy's most disastrous crisis in generations will reopen for takeaway service.

But bars and even ice cream parlors will remain shut. The use of public transport will be discouraged and everyone will have to wear masks in indoor public spaces. "We are feeling a mix of joy and fear," 40-year-old Stefano Milano said in Rome. "There will be great happiness in being able to go running again carefree, in my son being allowed to have his little cousin over to blow out his birthday candles, to see our parents," the father-of-three said. "But we are also apprehensive because they are old and my father-in-law has cancer so is high risk".

'Moment of responsibility'

Wuhan, the Chinese city where the virus emerged in December, led the world with an unprecedented lockdown on January 23 that lasted 76 days. Weeks later Italy followed suit, becoming the first Western democracy to shut down virtually everything in the face of an illness that has now officially killed 28,884 - the most in Europe-and some fear thousands more. The lives of Italians began closing in around them as it became increasingly apparent that the first batch of infections in provinces around Milan were spiraling out of control. Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte began by putting a quarter of the population in the northern industrial heartland on lockdown on March 8. The sudden measure frightened many-fearful of being locked in together with the gathering threat-into fleeing to less affected regions further south. The danger of the virus spreading with them and incapacitating the south's less developed health care system forced Conte to announce a nationwide lockdown on March 9.

"Today is our moment of responsibility," Conte told the nation. "We cannot let our guard down." The official death toll was then 724. More waves of restrictions followed as hundreds began dying each day. Almost everything except for pharmacies and grocery stores was shuttered across the Mediterranean country of 60 million on March 12.



ROME: A group of university students meet by maintaining social distancing atop their apartment building terrace in central Rome during the country's lockdown aimed at curbing the spread of the COVID-19 infection. — AFP

Conte's final roll of the dice involved closing all non-essential factories on March 22. Italy's highest single toll - 969 - was reported five days later.

'Worried about reopening'

The economic toll of all those shutdowns has been historic. Italy's economy-the eurozone's third-largest last year-is expected to shrink more than in any year since the global depression of the 1930s. Half of the workforce is receiving state support and the same number told a top pollster that they were afraid of becoming unemployed. And some of those who are out of a job already say they do not entirely trust in Conte's ability to safely navigate the nation out of peril.

"I am worried about the reopening. The authorities seem very undecided about how to proceed," 37-year-old Davide Napoleoni said. Conte's popularity has jumped along with that of most of other world leaders grappling with the pandemic thanks to a rally around the flag effect. But a Demos poll conducted at the end of April found some of Conte's lustre fading. Confidence in his government has slipped by eight percentage points to a still-strong 63 percent since March. Italy's staggered reopening is complicated by a highly decentralized system that allows the country's 20 regions to layer on their own rules. Venice's Veneto and the southern Calabria regions have thus been serving food and drink at bars and restaurants with outdoor seating since last week. The area around Genoa is thinking of allowing small groups of people to go sailing and reopening its beaches. Neighboring Emilia-Romagna is keeping them closed-even to those who live by the sea. All this uncertainty appears to be weighing on the nation's psyche. A poll by the Piepoli Institute showed 62 percent of Italians think they will need psychological support with coming to grips with the post-lockdown world. — AFP

Conflict-ridden Guinea in uphill COVID struggle

CONAKRY: Far from pulling together in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, Guineans remain embittered by a deadly, months-long political crisis, hampering efforts to contain the virus in the poor West African state. "The government banning something is all it takes for the people to reject it," said Hamidou Traore, a doctor at the capital Conakry's biggest hospital.

Mass demonstrations broke out in Guinea last October over suspicions that President Alpha Conde was planning constitutional changes that would allow him to extend his long rule. Dozens were killed, and deep distrust in the government persists. Guinea, one of the world's poorest countries, is among the hardest hit in the region by the pandemic, which has so far infected some 1,500 and killed seven.

The former French colony can little afford the political malaise in addition to a sorely deficient health system, with Guinea's main hospital, under renovation for the past four years, having to reopen suddenly at the onset of the pandemic. And yet Guinea has first-hand experience with infectious diseases, having been ravaged by Ebola between late 2013 and 2016. More than 2,500 people died of the hemorrhagic fever. Despite still raw memories of that epidemic, Guineans are loath to comply with restrictions urged by Conde and his government.

Grinding poverty, the need to go outdoors to make a living, and sheer fatalism add to the defiance. The government has imposed a nighttime curfew, closed Guinea's borders, banned gatherings and made mask-wearing compulsory. In Conakry, Fatoumata Mbo has seven workers turning out colored masks in the stifling heat of her sewing shop, one of hundreds in the city. "I get lots of orders (from) businesses and charities," the young woman said.

As during the Ebola epidemic, buckets of water have reappeared in the streets to encourage hand-washing-a minimum of hygiene. But compliance is spotty. Social distancing is "practically foreign to our culture," said sociologist Alpha Amadou Bano Barry. Conde meanwhile has announced a 243 million euro (\$267 million) plan to shore up the economy and to help those most in need. Prominent politicians including ministers and high-ranking civil servants have been infected, leaving ordinary people to think that "the disease favors the elite", Barry said. The head of the electoral commission died of COVID-19 two days after the results of the March 22 vote results were announced. — AFP

International

Probe into claims 'Afghan migrants forced into river' by Iranian guards

US military warns of 'responses' if Taliban violence continues

HERAT: The Afghan government said it has launched an investigation into claims that migrants attempting to enter Iran drowned after being forced into a river by Iranian border guards. Dozens of Afghans had crossed into Iran illegally from western Herat province when the incident happened on Friday, local media said. The Afghan Human Rights Commission on Sunday said it had spoken to survivors who accused Iranian forces of beating and torturing them.

"They were made to cross the Harirud river, as a result a number of them drowned and some survived," it said in a statement. The Afghan government said Saturday that the foreign ministry was investigating the incident. A government official who did not want to be named said seven migrants had died and 30 were still missing, according to survivors who returned to Herat. The Iranian consulate in Herat dismissed the reports and said no Afghan nationals had been arrested in the area.

The Iranian foreign ministry said in a statement on Sunday that "the incident occurred on Afghanistan's soil and Iran's border patrol has denied anything related to this happened on our country's territory". "We have investigated this in cooperation with (Afghanistan's) authorities," the statement added. There are between 1.5 million and three million Afghan refugees living and working in Iran, most of them as wage laborers on construction projects. Tens

of thousands returned to Afghanistan after the coronavirus outbreak, but as restrictions ease in badly-hit Iran, many are again seeking work there.

Taliban violence

In another development, the US military in Afghanistan has urged warring parties to "return to the political path" in a rare open letter to the Taliban as a surge in violence risks shattering a hoped-for peace process. In a two-page letter to the Taliban, US Forces-Afghanistan spokesman Colonel Sonny Leggett said "all sides" must show restraint to prevent further bloodshed.

"If the violence cannot be reduced then yes, there will be responses", Leggett wrote in a letter to Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid. "All sides must also return to the political path... Afghans should sit down now and begin talking about the future of Afghanistan together." The letter came after General Scott Miller, who leads US and NATO troops in Afghanistan, on April 28 warned the Taliban of potential consequences to continued violence.

Under the terms of a US-Taliban deal signed February 29, the Taliban committed to stop striking US and foreign partner troops, and agreed to start peace talks with the Kabul administration following an exchange of prisoners. In return, the US and oth-

er foreign troops will leave Afghanistan within 14 months of the deal signing. The US agreed not to attack the Taliban, though it has reserved the right to hit them to support Afghan forces if they come under attack. The Taliban also verbally committed to reduce violence by as much as 80 percent, Leggett said, and to halt attacks on urban areas.

Instead, there has been a "drastic increase" in violence, he noted. While the Taliban have refrained from hitting coalition forces and cities, they returned to the battlefield the moment the deal was signed and have been unleashing an average of 55 attacks a day on Afghan forces, according to Afghan officials. — Agencies



Iran's forces accused of torturing migrants



KABUL: People wait to receive free bread from the municipality outside a bakery during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan as government imposes a nationwide lockdown as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 coronavirus. — AFP

er foreign troops will leave Afghanistan within 14 months of the deal signing. The US agreed not to attack the Taliban, though it has reserved the right to hit them to support Afghan forces if they come under attack. The Taliban also verbally committed to reduce violence by as much as 80 percent, Leggett said, and to halt attacks on urban areas.

News in brief

Iran's OPEC governor in coma

TEHRAN: Iran's OPEC governor Hossein Kazempour-Ardebili has fallen into a coma after suffering a brain haemorrhage, the country's oil ministry said. "Kazempour_Ardebili is in a coma. He was hospitalized on Friday due to a severe brain haemorrhage," the ministry said in a tweet on Sunday. "May Lord's healing hand rest upon him," it said, without giving any further details. The veteran politician was appointed governor to the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries in 1985. He had also served as the Islamic republic's ambassador to Japan from 1990 to 1995. A founding member of the OPEC oil cartel, Iran sits on the world's fourth-biggest oil reserves and second-largest gas reserves. But its economy has been battered by sanctions imposed by the United States since US President Donald Trump pulled out of the Iran nuclear deal in 2018. — AFP

Chile orders strict measures

SANTIAGO: Chile ordered strict new quarantine measures on three districts in the capital Santiago after a sudden spike in coronavirus cases Sunday. The health ministry reported a surge of 1,228 new infections, bringing the total to nearly 20,000 nationwide and dealing a blow to hopes it was over the worst of the crisis. "If we do not win the battle in Santiago, we can lose the war against the coronavirus," warned Health Minister Jaime Manalich. Cerillos, Quilicura and Recoleta districts—as well as the northern mining city of Antofagasta—would be quarantined from next Tuesday, he said. Santiago, with a population of seven million, has been the country's main center of infections, particularly in its three richest suburbs. — AFP

Indian Kashmir gun battles

SRINAGAR: Five security personnel and four suspected militants were killed in two gun battles in Indian-administered Kashmir, officials said Sunday. Tensions are high in the restive Himalayan region contested with nuclear rival Pakistan after New Delhi scrapped Kashmir's semi-autonomous status in early August, with flashes of violence reported regularly. Four army personnel, including two officers, a counterinsurgency policeman and two militants died after a firefight in the village of Changimul near the Line of Control that divides the disputed territory, said army spokesman Colonel Rajesh Kalia. They had entered a home to "evacuate the civilians" but came under "heavy fire" from militants inside the building, Kalia added in the statement. — AFP

Few masks in Burkina mosques

OUAGADOUGOU: Muslims, many praying shoulder-to-shoulder and without face masks, crowded mosques in Burkina Faso's capital Ouagadougou on Sunday, after the government lifted an order closing them. Authorities ordered mosques to be closed in March as the coronavirus outbreak grew in the West African country, which as of Sunday, had recorded 652 cases and 44 deaths from COVID-19. But the order faced opposition, particularly during the ongoing holy month of Ramadan and on Saturday about 100 people protested outside the offices of the Federation of Islamic Associations of Burkina (FAIB) to demand its withdrawal. The FAIB, which acts as an intermediary between the government and Muslims, later said that the government had lifted the order, provided that worshippers wore masks and respected physical distancing and other health restrictions. — Reuters

Forty years on, Tito legacy still a hot topic

BELGRADE: A benevolent unifier or power-hungry dictator? On the 40th anniversary of his death, the legacy of the late Yugoslav leader Josip Broz Tito remains a subject of debate in the Balkan lands once united by his grip. There will be no official state ceremonies on Monday to honor the 40th anniversary of Tito's passing in the countries that emerged from the bloody unraveling of his socialist Yugoslavia.

But faithful devotees are expected to pay their dues—though in small numbers due to coronavirus restrictions—at his marble grave in Belgrade and his native village of Kumrovec in Croatia. With a mix of charisma and coercion, Tito held Yugoslavia's diverse patchwork of peoples together for almost four decades until his death at age 87 on May 4, 1980. Without him, the federation lasted only a decade longer before fracturing along ethnic lines in a series of wars that claimed more than 130,000 lives.

Decades later, the Marshal's shadow falls unevenly across the countries that still bear the scars of those conflicts. His popularity has waned in places such as Croatia and Serbia, where nationalistic sentiments still hold strong sway. But strains of Yugo-nostalgia, as it is known, can still be found across the region among those who pine for the



BUGOJNO: Photo shows the ruins of ex-Yugoslav, socialist leader Josip Broz Tito's hunting lodge, near the Central-Bosnian town of Bugojno. — AFP

open borders and prosperity that elude the poor countries today. Aleksandra, a 48-year-old in Montenegro, remembers an "organised, respected and large country, and I associate this with Tito". "I felt a sense of belonging in Yugoslavia," she added. "The last three decades have been a regression in every sense: economic, social, cultural."

Tito has always defied easy categorization. Born to a Slovene mother, Croat father and married to a Serb, he seemed to embody his vision for a multi-ethnic Yugoslavia. The leader of a socialist state also had a taste for glamour and hosted a range of glitterati, from Hollywood stars to British royalty, at his many villas. — AFP



JAKARTA: A truck from the Indonesian Red Cross sprays disinfectant along a street as a partial lockdown still exists amid concerns due to the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic in Jakarta. — AFP

Superheroes from 'near and far' join Indonesia virus fight

SUKOHARJO: Volunteers clad as Superman and Spider-Man sprayed disinfectant against the coronavirus on Indonesia's island of Java, flanking a colleague wearing the winged helmet of local superhero Gatotkaca who shouted, "Wear masks, wash hands and stay alert." The trio handed out masks, containers of hand sanitiser and bamboo slit drums, while demonstrating how to correctly wash hands, don masks and maintain security following reports of a spate of thefts in the residential area.

The Southeast Asian nation has reported more than 11,000 virus infections and 845 deaths, though a sluggish early response to the pandemic and low rates of testing cause medical experts to worry there could be far more cases. "If the superheroes support (the measures), the children will definitely

obey the orders," said Widanarko, who coordinated the event aimed at teaching people to protect themselves.

"First, washing their hands. Second, not wandering outside and always wearing a mask," added Widanarko, who uses one name. People could use the traditional bamboo slit drums handed out to sound the alarm over robberies or thefts by any criminals who take advantage of measures against the virus, said Widanarko, speaking in the Kampung Larangan neighborhood. One resident, Herni Kurniawati, welcomed the effort, saying it would encourage people to change their habits to protect themselves.

"Usually it's very difficult to ask the children to wear masks because for them it's a hassle," added Kurniawati. In the city of Makassar on the neighboring island of Sulawesi, another group of superheroes was walking the streets to get out the message. Braving traffic at a busy intersection, volunteers dressed as Deadpool, Black Panther and another, garbed in the red and bold body armor of Indonesian superhero, Bima-X, held up placards that read "Stay Home" and "Get Well Soon Earth". —Reuters

Afghan 'dancing boys' lead double lives

KABUL: In conservative Afghanistan, former dancing boy Farhad leads a double life; married father-of-six by day, cross-dressing dancer and sex worker by night. The practice of "bacha bazi" - translated as "boy play" - involves boys dressing up and dancing at private parties, but it was outlawed in 2017 amid concerns it fostered sexual abuse and servitude of young boys by powerful, older men. Islamic clerics led calls for the centuries-old tradition to be stopped, saying those involved should be stoned for sodomy which is forbidden under Islamic law.

"(But bacha bazi) continues to happen and is a grave human rights violation," said Abdul Rasheed, executive director of the non-profit Youth Health and Development Organization (YHDO). "Pressing charges against the perpetrators is almost impossible as many are in a position of power," he added. The YHDO has highlighted how sexual abuse and trafficking of boys was a practice that exploded during Afghanistan's civil war in the 1990s, with boys from rural areas flocking to cities to find work to support families, leaving them vulnerable to abuse.

In 2019 aid workers said they were seeing a growing number of children orphaned or forced to work on the streets. But human rights campaigners voiced concerns not only about the abuse of young boys but the impact on those forced into this kind of exploitation in their later lives. Farhad, now 29 - who asked not to be identified by his real name - said he was raped in his early teens by several local police officers but his parents quickly moved from their home city and never wanted to talk about the attack or report it. Shame, or threats from those responsible, prevents most victims of sexual abuse from speaking up in a country where the sexes are strictly segregated and it is common for men to dance for other men at weddings. Psychologist Lyla Schwartz, who works with child victims of rape in war-torn Afghanistan, said harsh parental attitudes meant many abuse victims carried the trauma into adulthood. — Reuters

Business

TUESDAY, MAY 5, 2020

10 How COVID-19 is honing Kuwait's focus on food security**10** Mazda 6 with a generous price in the holy month**11** Trump pushing to rip global supply chains from China?

HANDAN: An employee working at a textile factory in Handan in China's northern Hebei province. Asia's factory activity was ravaged in April, business surveys showed yesterday and the outlook dimmed further as government restrictions on movement to contain the coronavirus outbreak froze global production and slashed demand. —AFP

Pandemic ravages Asia's factories

Outlook remains dim as lockdown freezes global production, slashes demand

SYDNEY: Asia's factory activity was ravaged in April, business surveys showed yesterday and the outlook dimmed further as government restrictions on movement to contain the coronavirus outbreak froze global production and slashed demand. A series of Purchasing Managers' Indexes (PMIs) from IHS Markit fell deeper into contraction from March, with some diving to all-time lows and others hitting levels last seen during the 2008-2009 global financial crisis.

Similar gauges out of Europe later are also expected to show industry conditions wallowing around record lows, reinforcing the International Monetary Fund's warning the global economy is headed for its biggest decline since the 1930s. The PMI for South Korea, Asia's fourth-largest economy and a global manufacturing powerhouse, skidded to 41.6 in April, the lowest reading since January 2009. Japan's PMI released last week similarly fell to an 11-year low.

"The bad news is that the hit to industry in many places is unlikely to be past the worst," Alex Holmes, Asia Economist at Capital Economics, wrote in a note.

"Global demand has slumped and we don't think it has bottomed out yet. The latest incoming data for the US and Western Europe point to an unprecedented slump in demand. And while China's economy has started to recover, demand there remains very weak." Last week, China's official PMI showed factory activity still growing in April, albeit more slowly than March, while the private-sector Caixin

PMI showed a dip into contraction, although at a much gentler pace than the rest of the world. Significantly, exporters in both surveys were jolted by steep falls in orders.

While China appears to be ahead of others in emerging from the economic paralysis inflicted by the pandemic, any



China predicted to emerge first from crisis

recovery is expected to be gradual and unlikely to fire up an immediate resurgence in global demand. The PMI for Taiwan, a major producer of high-end technology components, fell to 42.2, its lowest since 2009 and down from an expansionary 50.4 in March.

The declines in South Korea's and Taiwan's PMIs showed contractions that were less severe than those seen in other

economies in the region, with indicators in India, Malaysia, Indonesia and Vietnam all reporting plunges to record lows. In India, Asia's third-largest economy, new orders and output shrank at the steepest pace since early 2005 and factories cut jobs at the fastest rate in the survey's history.

Capital Economics' Holmes said while South Korea and Taiwan held up better than other Asian peers, thanks mostly to effective government policies to contain the virus, conditions have nonetheless worsened. Official data released last week showed the coronavirus sent South Korean exports plunging in April at their sharpest pace since the global financial crisis. South Korean tech giant Samsung Electronics Co Ltd last week said it expected profits to decline in the current quarter due to a slump in sales.

It said that while work-from-home orders and growth in online learning would underpin demand for memory chips, the outlook for smartphones and TVs was bleak as consumers put off discretionary spending. The production slump is of particular concern to policymakers, who are worried about the socially destabilizing effects of massive unemployment as firms in both factory and service sectors slash headcount. A private-sector survey in Australia on Monday showed job advertisements plunging a record 53.1 percent in April, a decline that was almost five times larger than the previous record of 11.3 percent in January 2009. —Reuters

India's finance ministry declined to comment, while the Reserve Bank of India and Indian Banks' Association, the main industry body, did not immediately respond to emails seeking comment.

The Indian economy has ground to a standstill amid a 40-day nationwide lockdown to rein in the spread of coronavirus cases. The lockdown has now been extended by a further two weeks, but the government has begun to ease some restrictions in districts that are relatively unscathed by the virus. India has so far recorded nearly 40,000 cases of the coronavirus and more than 1,300 deaths from COVID-19, the respiratory disease caused by the coronavirus.

Bankers fear it is unlikely that the economy will fully open up before June or July, and loans, especially those to small- and medium-sized businesses which constitute nearly 20 percent of overall credit, may be among the worst affected. This is because all 10 of India's largest cities fall in high-risk red zones, where restrictions will remain stringent.

A report by Axis Bank said that these red zones, which contribute significantly to India's economy, account for roughly 83 percent of the overall loans made by its banks as of December. One of the sources, an executive director of a public sector bank, said that economic growth had been sluggish and risks had been heightened, even ahead of the coronavirus crisis.



"Now we have this Black Swan event which means without any meaningful government stimulus, the economy will be in tatters for several more quarters," he said. McKinsey & Co last month forecast India's economy could contract by around 20 percent in the three months through June, if the lockdown was extended to mid-May, and growth in the fiscal year was likely to fall 2 percent to 3 percent.

Bankers say the only way to stem the steep rise in bad loans is if the RBI significantly relaxes bad asset recognition rules. Banks have asked the central bank to allow all loans to be categorized as NPAs only after 180 days, which is double the current 90-day window.

"The lockdown is like riding the tiger, once we get off it we'll be in a difficult position," a senior private sector banker told Reuters. —Reuters

India expects bad debts at banks could double

MUMBAI/NEW DELHI: India expects bad debts at its banks could double after the coronavirus crisis brought the economy to a sudden halt, a senior government official and four top bankers told Reuters. Indian banks are already grappling with 9.35 trillion rupees (\$123 billion) of soured loans, which was equivalent to about 9.1 percent of their total assets at the end of September 2019.

"There is a considered view in the government that bank non-performing assets (NPAs) could double to 18-20 percent by the end of the fiscal year, as 20-25 percent of outstanding loans face a risk of default," the official with direct knowledge of the matter said. A fresh surge in bad debt could hit credit growth and delay India's recovery from the coronavirus pandemic.

"These are unprecedented times and the way it's going we can expect banks to report double the amount of NPAs from what we've seen in earlier quarters," the finance head of a top public sector bank told Reuters. The official and bankers declined to be named as they were not officially authorized to discuss the matter with media.

UAE airlines say years needed to restore demand

DUBAI: Top executives of Emirates and Etihad, two of the Middle East's biggest airlines, have said passenger demand may not return to pre-coronavirus crisis levels until 2023. About 85 percent of the world's airlines could face financial distress by the end of the year without government aid, Emirates President Tim Clark and Etihad CEO Tony Douglas told a video conference hosted by the US-UAE Business Council last week.

Clark and Douglas reiterated their beliefs that until an effective vaccine for the COVID-19 respiratory disease becomes widely available, how passengers fly will be different, a statement by the council said.

Lasting restrictions like 14-day quarantines, testing, and social distancing will impact demand and operations, they said. The airlines could not be reached for comment. Emirates and Etihad, which operate fleets of over 370 aircraft, a majority of them wide-bodied, have grounded their operations in March and are serving limited outbound flights to take repatriate foreigners from the United Arab Emirates. Dubai is expected to resume welcoming tourists by July, more than four months after halting the vital sector due to the coronavirus pandemic, an official said. The return however will be gradual and could be delayed until September. Helal al-Marri, the director general of Dubai's Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing, told Bloomberg TV last week. A majority of global airlines have also stopped operations due to shutdowns imposed to counter the spread of the novel coronavirus.

The International Air Transport Association has repeatedly called on governments to provide generous aid to airlines.

IATA said on April 23 that air traffic in the Middle East and North Africa is set to plummet by more than half due to the virus crisis. It also said that MENA airlines' revenues are forecast to slump by \$24.5 billion this year compared to 2019. The International Civil Aviation Organization, a UN agency, said last month that the pandemic could mean 1.2 billion fewer air passengers worldwide by September. IATA has urged governments to offer airlines direct financial support, loans and tax relief. —AFP

Business

American markets recover on signs of reopening economy: NBK Capital

Many countries have started to work their way down the curve

KUWAIT: Markets around the world took a much-needed breather in April as plans of gradually reopening the economy started to emerge. Many countries are now believed to have passed the peak in terms of new infections and are starting to work their way down the curve. The prospects of reopening the economy, along with the record fiscal and monetary stimulus plans put in place to counter the effects of the COVID-19, supported a solid rebound of the US markets during April. US markets generally outperformed their developed markets peers during April as the MSCI EAFE Index, representing the performance of developed markets outside North America, added 6.3 percent for the month against a 10.6 percent advance for the MSCI AC World Index.

In fact, April witnessed the best monthly performance for the Dow Jones Industrial Average (DJIA) and the S&P 500 in more than 3 decades advancing 11.08 percent and 12.68 percent respectively. The tech heavy Nasdaq Composite, on the other hand, added 15.45 percent representing its best monthly performance over the past 20 years. In the meantime, volatility continued to retreat with the CBOE Volatility Index (VIX) declining to 34.15 at the end of April from 57.0 at the end of the previous year. Treasuries moved mostly sideways as the 2-year yield ended the month at 0.20 percent and the 10-year at 0.64 percent compared to 0.23 percent and 0.62 percent at the end of March.

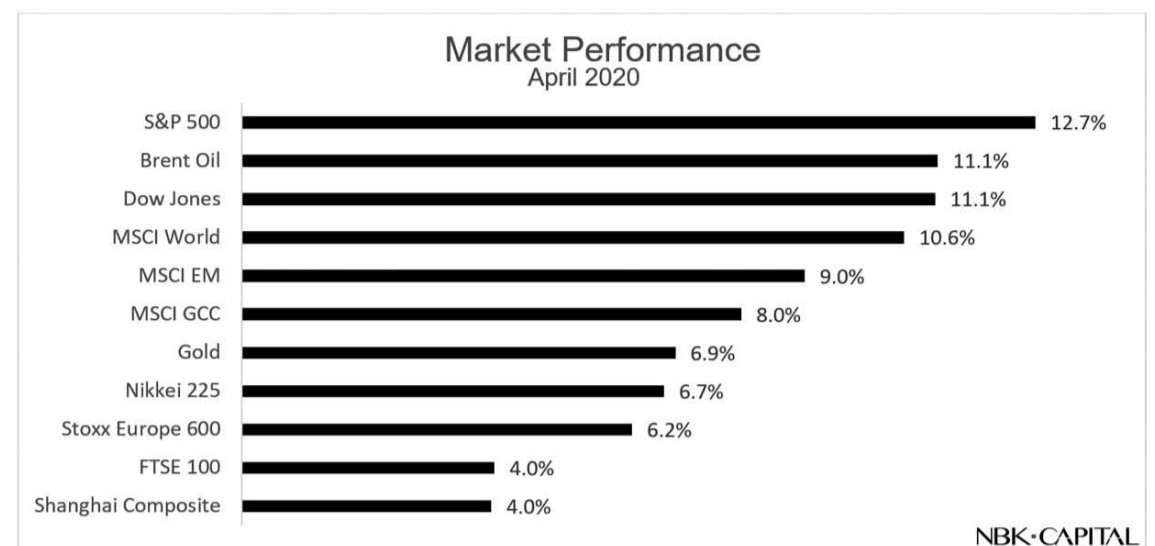
The economic indicators published during April started to reflect, at least partially, the depth of the crisis caused by the Covid19-induced economic shutdown in the US. The ISM Manufacturing PMI declined to 41.5 in April from 49.1 for March, while the ISM Manufacturing Employment Index dropped to 27.5 from 43.8 over the same period reflecting the dire state of employment in the

manufacturing sector.

Overall, the US economy shrank by 4.8 percent during the first quarter of the year according to the preliminary estimates of the annualized US GDP. The latest initial jobless numbers for the week ending April 24 topped expectations at 3.84 million against expectations of 3.5 million and compared to 4.44 million for the previous week. The continuing jobless claims, on the other hand, recorded 17.99 million as at April 17 up from 15.82 million a week earlier. These numbers started to seep into the US unemployment rate which edged up to 4.4 percent for March. Consensus estimates is for it to reach a record of 14 percent for April, which higher than its peak during the financial crisis of 10.2 percent in November 2009. Other estimates predict an even worst outcome as the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis forecasts that unemployment could rise to as much as 30 percent during the pandemic. The consensus estimates for Non-farm payroll for April due to be released Friday 08 May, on the other hand, point to a decline of 20 million compared to a decline of 700K for March.

European loss

In Europe preliminary Gross Domestic Product figures for the first quarter of 2020 showed a decline of 3.8 percent compared to the previous quarter. Similarly, preliminary estimates showed France's GDP declining by 5.8 percent during Q1 2020 compared to Q4 2019. The preliminary Markit Manufacturing PMIs for Europe's biggest economies, France and Germany, declined to 31.5 and 34.4 in April from 43.2 and 45.4 respectively. The Markit Manufacturing PMI for the EU, on the other hand, declined to 33.6 on a preliminary basis from 44.5 over the same period. Meanwhile, the Stoxx Europe 600 index underperformed its global peers and advanced by 6.24



percent and so did the French CAC40 index with a gain of 4.0 percent for the month. The German DAX, on the other hand, managed an advance of 9.3 percent. Stocks in the UK also underperformed with the FTSE 100 Index rebounding for a gain of 4.0 percent for April after having plunged by around 14 percent in March. The Markit Manufacturing PMI for the UK dropped to 32.6 in April from 47.8 in March as manufacturing activity grinded to a halt a result of the pandemic-induced global lockdown.

The performance of Emerging markets was generally at par with that of the US, with some markets outperforming. The MSCI EM index managed a 9 percent recovery during April after a loss of almost 16 percent in March, while the MSCI Asia ex-Japan added 8.9 percent reducing its year-to-date loss to 11.4 percent. The best performing indices in the EM space included India's Nifty 50 which added 14.7 percent, Taiwan Stock Exchange with a gain of 13.2 percent, and Turkey's Borsa Istanbul 100 Index with a gain of 12.8 percent. Russia, Mexico and Shanghai underperformed recording gains of 5.7 percent,

5.5 percent and 4.0 percent respectively.

The GCC markets witnessed broad based gains despite the continued weakness in oil prices. The S&P GCC composite and the S&P Pan Arab Indices both added 8.2 percent during April driven by a strong performance in the UAE and Saudi Arabia. Markets in the UAE topped the list of GCC gainers with 14.4 percent for Dubai DFM General Index and 13.3 percent for Abu Dhabi's ADX General Index. The Saudi Tadawul All Share index also rebounded strongly with a gain of 9.3 percent and was followed by the Qatar Exchange Index which added 6.8 percent for the month. Kuwait and Oman underperformed with the Boursa Kuwait All Share Index adding 3.2 percent in April after a loss of 20.6 percent in March and the MSM 30 Index gaining 2.6 percent. Bahrain was the only market recording a loss in the GCC with the All Share Index retreating by 2.9 percent. In the MENA region, Egypt's EGX30 rebounded by 10.0 percent while Morocco's MADEX retreated by a further 3.2 percent after the previous month's loss of 21.3 percent.



Boursa Kuwait All Share Index adds 3.2% in April

Oxford Business Group Report

How Covid-19 is honing Kuwait's focus on food security

With the coronavirus pandemic placing pressure on international trade and global supply chains, Kuwait has moved to strengthen its food security through increased international cooperation and investment in agriculture technology (agri-tech). On April 17 the GCC adopted a Kuwaiti proposal to create a joint food supply network across the bloc.

Triggered by concerns about Covid-19-related disruptions to trade, the countries agreed to set up special arrangements at border control and Customs posts, in order to facilitate the movement of basic food and medical supplies within the six-member alliance. In addition, Kuwait sought to further consolidate its food supplies in April by striking a deal to streamline the importation of Egyptian products, which were previously subject to extensive testing, while it also approved imports of beef from Brazil.

Furthermore, Kuwait has increased investment in its own agricultural capacity. On April 6 Kuwait's Wafra International Investment Company announced that it would invest \$100m in regional start-up Pure Harvest, representing the largest ever commitment to an agri-tech firm in the Middle East.

The funding will support the company's plans to construct high-tech, climate-controlled greenhouses that use natural sunlight to produce pesticide-free fruit and vegetables. The development of such technology is particularly relevant in countries such as Kuwait that enjoy a high rate of annual sunlight but low rainfall.

Although the company is headquartered in Abu Dhabi, Pure Harvest representatives said that the funding will be utilised for expansion across various Middle Eastern markets, among them Kuwait.



Improving food security

The development of agri-tech and domestic agricultural production has become a key issue for Kuwait and other Gulf countries in recent years, as governments have highlighted the importance of food security. Changing climatic patterns in key agricultural exporting countries - including the increased prevalence of desertification, drought, flooding and other extreme weather phenomena - have placed pressure on the global food chain, according to the UN, potentially leaving low-production agriculture countries like Kuwait at risk of food shortages.

The importance of building resilience has been underlined in recent months by the Covid-19-related disruption to global supply chains. As the virus has spread, many countries have closed borders, cancelled flights and implemented lockdowns, impacting many pre-existing food linkages.

While these challenges have spurred some countries to take issues of food security seriously for the first time, Kuwait had already been making progress on this front. In the 2019 Global Food Security Index, compiled by the Economist Intelligence Unit, Kuwait was ranked 27th out of 113 countries, and fourth out of 15 in the MENA region.

Although it rose just one position against its 2018 ranking, Kuwait was labelled the world's most improved country in this most recent index, largely thanks to an upgrade of agricultural infrastructure, including new grain

silos and expanded crop storage capacity at ports.

Broader stimulus

Efforts to improve food security come amid broader measures to support the economy in the face of the virus-induced economic downturn (<https://oxfordbusinessgroup.com/news/kuwait-s-coordinated-response-covid-19>).

Due to Kuwait's substantial dependence on oil revenues, which accounted for 43.7% of GDP in 2018, the country has been doubly affected by the dramatic fall in global oil prices that accompanied the outbreak of the pandemic. To help offset these challenges, on March 16 the Central Bank of Kuwait cut its benchmark interest rate by 100 basis points to 1.5 percent, while on April 2 it released a stimulus package that, among other measures, made \$16.5bn available for additional lending from local banks.

Despite these actions, the economy is expected to contract by 1.1 percent this year, according to the IMF's revised annual outlook, released in April, down from 0.7 percent growth in 2019. On the medical front, as of May 3 Kuwait had 4983 confirmed cases of Covid-19 and 38 virus-related fatalities.

Kuwait's robust health care response has been aided by one of the highest per capita testing rates in the world, with 45,988 tests conducted per 1m of the population.

Jordan sees economy down 3% in 2020 due to coronavirus

AMMAN: Jordan's cash-strapped economy is expected to contract around 3 percent in 2020 due to the impact of the coronavirus as government revenue plunges due to a tight lockdown that paralyzed businesses, the finance minister said on Sunday.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF), which last March approved a four-year \$1.3 billion program with the kingdom, had expected Jordan's economy to grow around 2.1 percent in 2020 then gradually rise in the next few years to 3.3 percent. "The impact of the big economic blow that hit the local economy has been deep and this will continue," Mohammad Al-Ississ said in a remarks on state television in the first contraction in growth since 1990.

The government has in recent days stepped up moves to return to normality, allowing most businesses to go back to work after a tight nearly two-month lockdown, as the economic impact deepened with mounting fears that layoffs and bankruptcies could trigger social unrest, officials say in private.

Al-Ississ said government revenue plunged by 610 million dinars (\$860 million) in the year to April compared to the previous year, pushing a fiscal deficit well beyond a previous forecast of 2.3 percent of gross domestic product. "Our revenues have been dealt a heavy shock and this will lead to the rise in the deficit, but we know we are in a battle for survival to protect our economy," Al-Ississ said. He did not give any estimate of the projected increase. —Reuters

Mazda 6 with a generous price in the holy month

KUWAIT: Kuwait Automotive Imports Co, Kaico, Al Shaya & Al Sagar, the authorized distributors of Mazda vehicles in Kuwait has announced the most challenging offer during the holy month of Ramadan that grants clients the unique opportunity to own Mazda 6 2020 with a fantastic price starting from KD 5,950 only. This price comes with the support of the factory to ensure the ease of buying Mazda cars and the joy of driving one.

As the flagship of the Mazda Lineup, Mazda 6 has always been the most elegant and refined statement of the KODO design language and Mazda 6 expresses this with its dynamic design and powerful three-dimensionality in the grille and signature wings. Mazda 6 is the perfect car of the driver, it is a sporty personal car equipped with everything necessary in the cockpit which has been dedicated to help you enjoy the drive.

High-efficiency SKYACTIV-G direct-injection petrol engines are your passport to a world of driving that is both exciting and eco-friendly. The engine delivers a fuel efficiency of up to 15 percent. Safety features include Lane-Keep Assist System, Lane Departure Warning System and Smart Brake Support, all to ensure the safety of your loved ones. While the interior is characterized by the MZD CONNECT system, which gives you superior



connectivity to the Internet and advanced navigation system.

While Mazda insists on its firm traditions to being one of few vehicles manufacturers located in Japan, the company developed the Mazda 6 to become one of the best saloon cars that combines the luxury appearance with a sporty, sculpted design. As well as a full suite of Mazda's groundbreaking SKYACTIV TECHNOLOGY that now includes G-Vectoring control (GVC).

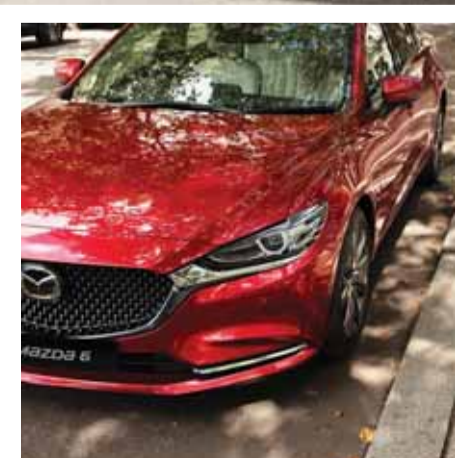
Ashish Tandon, General Manager of Kaico stated "We in Kaico will continue to provide products, technologies, and experiences that exceed customer's expectations so that our car-loving customers and their families can experience the joy of driving. With this approach, we aim to become the company with the closest bonds to its customers."

Nader Salmeh, Senior executive

Manager added that this offer is the perfect chance for clients to own the Mazda 6 while it lasts & is considered one of most desired vehicles in the Mazda range in the global market. Mazda vehicles are closer to being a premium brand than they ever were & this once in a lifetime opportunity should be seized since it is for a limited quantity of Mazda 6.

And added "During this difficult period in the face of the global crisis, Kaico is taking maximum steps to ensure the safety of its customers, including the continuous cleaning of its facilities, as well as the continuous sterilization of all its cars."

As part of its efforts to gain customer satisfaction, Mazda Al Shaya and Al Sagar provides integrated electronic services that include the ability to book a Mazda test drive at your doorstep and the ability to purchase your car online without the



need of leaving the house as the company's sales consultant would arrive to customers in order to complete the transaction. Recently Mazda Corporation celebrated 100 years of car manufacturing and Kaico has been their partner for over 50 years. Kaico was founded in 1936 and is one of the main pillars of the Al SHAYA Commercial Group. Kaico is the author-

ized distributor for Mazda, Peugeot, Michelin & Apollo tires, Mobil lubricants, Iveco trucks, Eicher buses and Royal Enfield motor bikes.

Business

Global, GCC markets recover virus losses on economic stimulus: Markaz

S&P GCC composite index advanced by 8.6% in April

KUWAIT: Kuwait Financial Centre "Markaz" recently released its Monthly Markets Review report for the month of April 2020. Markaz report stated that, GCC markets, other than Bahrain, posted gains spurred by policy responses and ease of lockdown despite historically low oil prices and weak economic outlook.



Monthly markets review

Markaz report stated that Kuwait All Share Index registered gains of 3.2 percent in April. MSCI has postponed Kuwait's inclusion to its Emerging Markets Index from May to November 2020 due to the coronavirus outbreak. Fitch Ratings has affirmed Kuwait's long-term foreign-currency issuer default rating at 'AA' with a stable outlook, citing the country's strong fiscal and external balance sheets. IMF has estimated Kuwait's GDP to fall by 1.1 percent in 2020. Among Kuwait's Blue Chip companies, Agility Public Warehousing gained the most at 13.0 percent.

Central Bank of Kuwait has announced a slew of measures during the month to support the economy. The measures include reducing banks' capital adequacy requirements, easing the risk weighting for SMEs, increase in maximum lending limit etc. Banking sector index was up by 2.0 percent for the month. Listing of Boursa Kuwait's shares and KFH-AUB merger process have been postponed citing coronavirus outbreak. While Consumer goods sector was the top gainer at 16.9 percent, Insurance sector was the top loser, falling by 1.8 percent.

Regionally, the S&P GCC composite index increased by 8.6 percent for the month, with all markets except Bahrain posting gains. Optimism over OPEC+ deal, policy responses and ease of lockdown boosted market sentiments. Dubai registered the highest gain, increasing by 14.4 percent, followed by Abu Dhabi, which gained 13.3 percent. UAE announced measures such as doubling of stimulus to USD 70 billion and extension of VAT payment. Dubai Expo has been postponed by a year to October 2021. Saudi Arabia gained 9.3 percent for the month. Bahrain ended the month in negative territory, losing 3.0 percent. Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Abu Dhabi have issued sovereign bonds to the tune of \$24 billion in April. Spending cuts were

Regional Market Trends – April 2020			
Equity	Last close	April %	2020 %
S&P GCC	94.72	8.6	-18.4
Saudi Arabia (TASI)	7,112.90	9.3	-15.2
Qatar (QE Index)	8,764.05	6.8	-15.9
Abu Dhabi (ADI)	4,230.37	13.3	-16.7
Kuwait (All Share PR Index)	4,975.39	3.2	-20.8
Dubai (DFMGI)	2,026.61	14.4	-26.7
Bahrain (BAX)	1,310.73	-3.0	-18.6
Oman (Muscat SM)	3,539.46	2.6	-11.1
Commodities			
IPE Brent(\$)	25	11.1	-61.7
Gold(\$)	1,680	6.9	10.8

Source: Refinitiv

announced by Saudi Arabia, Dubai, Oman and Bahrain on expectation of lower oil revenue. The countries have also eased lockdown seeking to contain economic fall-out. IMF has estimated GCC's real GDP to contract by 2.7 percent in 2020.

Blue-chips gain

Markaz report also stated that among the GCC Blue Chip companies,

International Holding Company (UAE) had gained the most, increasing by 87.4 percent. Abu Dhabi Commercial Bank (UAE) has declined by 4.1 percent. The bank has an exposure of \$981 million to the troubled NMC Health.

The performance of Global equity markets was positive with the MSCI World Index gaining 10.8 percent for the month. US equities (S&P 500) gained by 12.7 per-

cent in April. The UK market (FTSE 100 index) closed 4.0 percent higher during April. The markets gained on the back of stimulus measures to cushion coronavirus' impact and news of easing of lockdown. However, the economic data looks dire with U.S unemployment rate for April expected to reach 16 percent and its GDP for Q2 2020 expected to fall by 30-40 percent. Emerging markets ended the month in positive, with the MSCI EM posting monthly gain of 9.0 percent.

Oil prices closed at \$25.0 per barrel at the end of April 2020, which is 11.1 percent higher than March 2020. Earlier this month, OPEC+ agreed to cut crude oil production by 9.7 million barrels per day. The momentum towards achieving a deal helped push prices up, to about \$34.0 per barrel. However, the markets started falling back as the supply cuts were perceived to be lesser compared to the reduction in demand. WTI Crude oil futures expiring in May touched \$-40.0 per barrel towards contract expiry because of concerns over storages nearing their full capacity in the face of steep fall in demand. Oil ended the month in positive territory supported by announcement of production cuts, USCrude glut growing at a slower rate than expected and news of easing lockdown. Gold has gained 6.9 percent over the month.

NBK extends validity of NBK Miles and Rewards Points

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) remains at the service of its customers and amidst the difficult conditions imposed by the Novel Coronavirus and affecting the country and the world, the bank has taken several measures to protect the rights of customers and ensure their needs are met.

The bank has therefore extended the validity of NBK Miles Points available for NBK Credit Cardholders that expired after April 1, 2020 and NBK Rewards Points that expired after March 24, 2020 for eligible NBK Credit and Prepaid Cardholders until further notice to give customers the opportunity to benefit from them at a later time once these particularly difficult times come to an end and life returns back to normal. Customers earn NBK Miles Points when using the following NBK Credit Cards: NBK Miles World Mastercard, Visa Signature, World Elite Mastercard and Visa Infinite Credit Cards. While customers can earn NBK Rewards Points when using their eligible NBK Credit and Prepaid Cards at the participating merchants.

Bader Al-Janah, Consumer Banking Group at National Bank of Kuwait, said: "We strive at NBK, and especially in these exceptional circumstances, to serve our customers as best as we can to meet their needs, all while prioritizing their safety and the highest level of quality in an integrated banking experience that is unaffected by current conditions."

Al-Janah added that the extension of the validity of NBK Miles Points and NBK Rewards Points comes as part of the bank's endeavors to protect customers' rights and to guarantee that they receive all the necessary support and continue to benefit from these services when these difficult times come to an end. Al-Janah said: "NBK Rewards Program is a leading loyal-



Bader Al-Janah

ty program that is exclusive to our customers. As we move forward, we are committed to continue developing the program by adding many more benefits and launching campaigns that suit their diverse needs."

He confirmed that NBK Credit Cards give customers the opportunity to take part in these campaigns which are launched throughout the year. Customers also enjoy a unique lifestyle thanks to

the many benefits offered by these cards to their holders, ensuring they enrich their banking experience at all times.

Customers earn NBK Miles Points every time they shop in stores or online, withdraw cash, or make any other payment transaction inside or outside Kuwait as well as when using their cards while traveling. They can redeem their points online to book flights with 800 airlines, or an accommodation with 150,000 hotels or rent a car at leading car rentals from around the world. Customers can also exchange their points with any other airline rewards program participating in the NBK Miles Program.

NBK Rewards Program is the largest loyalty program in Kuwait with over 850 participating outlets, offering eligible NBK Credit and Prepaid Cardholders guaranteed rewards at hundreds of leading local and international brands that satisfy all tastes in fashion, restaurants and other brands that suit the unique lifestyle of every customer segment.

NBK Credit Cards are the best and convenient method to make payments and give customers access to many benefits, especially when using their credit card for shopping, including the NBK Rewards Program, NBK Miles Program, NBK Secure Shopping, and warranty extension service.



President Donald Trump has long pledged to bring manufacturing back from overseas.

Trump pushing to rip global supply chains from China?

WASHINGTON: The Trump administration is "turbocharging" an initiative to remove global industrial supply chains from China as it weighs new tariffs to punish Beijing for its handling of the coronavirus outbreak, according to officials familiar with US planning.

President Donald Trump, who has stepped up recent attacks on China ahead of the Nov 3 US presidential election, has long pledged to bring manufacturing back from overseas. Now, economic destruction and the massive US coronavirus death toll are driving a government-wide push to move US production and supply chain dependency away from China, even if it goes to other more friendly nations instead, current and former senior US administration officials said.

"We've been working on [reducing the reliance of our supply chains in China] over the last few years but we are now turbo-charging that initiative," Keith Krach, under-secretary for Economic Growth, Energy and the Environment at the US State Department told Reuters.

"I think it is essential to understand where the critical areas are and where critical bottlenecks exist," Krach said, adding that the matter was key to US security and one the government could announce new action on soon. The US Commerce Department, State and other agencies are looking for ways to push companies to move both sourcing and manufacturing out of China. Tax incentives and potential re-shoring subsidies are among measures being considered to spur changes, the current and former officials told Reuters.

"There is a whole of government push on this," said one. Agencies are probing which manufacturing should be deemed "essential" and how to produce these goods outside of China.

Trump's China policy has been defined by behind-the-scenes tussles between pro-trade advisers and China hawks; now the latter say their time has come. "This

moment is a perfect storm: the pandemic has crystallized all the worries that people have had about doing business with China," said another senior US official. "All the money that people think they made by making deals with China before, now they've been eclipsed many fold by the economic damage" from the coronavirus, the official said.

Economic prosperity network

Trump has said repeatedly that he could put new tariffs on top of the up to 25 percent tax on \$370 billion in Chinese goods currently in place. US companies, which pay the tariffs, are already groaning under the existing ones, especially as sales plummet during coronavirus lockdowns. But that does not mean Trump will balk at new ones, officials say. Other ways to punish China may include sanctions on officials or companies, and closer relations with Taiwan, the self-governing island China considers a province.

But discussions about moving supply chains are concrete, robust, and, unusually for the Trump administration, multi-lateral. The United States is pushing to create an alliance of "trusted partners" dubbed the "Economic Prosperity Network," one official said. It would include companies and civil society groups operating under the same set of standards on everything from digital business, energy and infrastructure to research, trade, education and commerce, he said. —Reuters



Southwest Airlines Boeing 737 MAX aircraft are parked on the tarmac after being grounded, at the Southern California Logistics Airport in Victorville, California. — AFP

Southwest Airlines CEO says it's safe to fly again

WASHINGTON: The CEO of Southwest Airlines, one of the largest US air companies, insisted Sunday that travelers could again fly in safety and added that air traffic, nearly paralyzed by the coronavirus pandemic, was gradually reviving. Asked on CBS whether it was again safe to fly, Gary Kelly replied, "It is. We're doing everything possible to encourage people to come back and fly."

He said his airline was taking a number of safety precautions: passengers and crew members will be required to wear masks; planes will receive deep cleaning between flights; and some seats will be left empty to allow a degree of social distancing. "I don't think the risk on an airplane is any greater risk than anywhere else," Kelly said. "You look at the layered approach that we use, it's as safe as any environment you're going to find." Kelly said he believes the worst has passed for the industry.

"I think we've seen the bottom here," he said. "Each week after the first week of April has gotten succes-

sively better. I don't think June will be a good month, but... we're looking forward to July and August." He acknowledged, however, that things remain in flux.

"There are bookings in place, but those could easily be canceled," he said. "It is one day at a time." Southwest has received \$3.2 billion in emergency assistance from the government and has applied for an additional loan, but Kelly said he was not sure it would be needed. He said the government's relief plan had given the markets sufficient confidence that his company was able to raise an additional \$6 billion last week. "I think we have what we need to see our way through," Kelly said. "We have until September to make that decision" on additional government aid.

The federal assistance is conditioned on companies preserving jobs until the end of September.

But the Southwest chief said that unless the recovery starts to kick in by July, the company might have to order a first round of layoffs. The Trump administration is distributing \$25 billion in emergency assistance to airline companies, which employ some 750,000 workers in the United States. The celebrated investor Warren Buffett, ranked as the world's fourth richest man, said Saturday that he had made a mistake by investing in the four biggest US airlines, including Southwest. He said his Berkshire Hathaway conglomerate had sold all its airline shares, including the 10 percent of Southwest shares it had held. — AFP

Lufthansa hopeful on deal for German state aid

BERLIN: Europe's biggest airline group Lufthansa said yesterday it was close to a deal with the German government on state aid to ease the impact of the coronavirus crisis. The group, which warns it is bleeding cash and might have to declare insolvency, had appeared to be stalled in its bid for up to 10 billion euros (\$11 billion) in aid, according to a report in the weekly Der Spiegel. But in a note from Lufthansa directors to staff seen by AFP, the company said it has held "intense and constructive exchanges" with the German government on the financial help.

"In our view these discussions could be concluded in the near future," it said. "Support from the German state constitutes an essential step towards ensuring our future," it added, as Europe begins to ease measures taken to stem the spread of COVID-19. Like airlines worldwide, Lufthansa and its subsidiaries that include Swiss and Austrian Airlines have been essentially grounded and face an uncertain future once operations are fully up and running again.

In April, chief executive Carsten Spohr said the group was carrying fewer than 3,000 passengers daily

compared with a pre-pandemic average of around 350,000 a day.

"We are losing about a million euros in liquidity reserves per hour. Day and night. Week by week," Spohr said. According to Der Spiegel, the German government is holding out for a stake of just over 25 percent in the group in exchange for financial aid, which would put Berlin in a position to block strategic decisions by Lufthansa management.

No blank cheques

The Social Democratic Party (SPD), which includes Finance Minister Olaf Scholz among its ranks, has warned Lufthansa it cannot expect a blank cheque from Berlin. "The state is not some idiot that will just hand over money and have no say after that," SPD leader Carsten Schneider told the daily Die Welt in comments to appear today.

In particular, he ruled out dividend payments to Lufthansa shareholders if the company received state aid. But Lufthansa directors have warned that without such aid they could declare insolvency to benefit from a grace period during which they could try to sort out the group's finances.

That might mean job cuts, especially given that Spohr has said there are now 10,000 too many workers given the state of Lufthansa's operations. Around 700 of its roughly 760 aircraft are currently parked at airports and more than 80,000 of its 130,000 staff are on part-time work schemes. — AFP

Quebec doctors who agree to help hard pressed care homes describe 'shock'

MONTREAL: As retirement homes in Quebec were being ravaged by COVID-19, a surgeon, an ophthalmologist and a gastroenterologist were among many medical professionals who volunteered to help overstretched staff with the care and feeding of their vulnerable residents. The experience left them badly shaken.

Dr. Yves Bendauid, a 49-year-old surgeon, responded to an urgent plea from the province's premier, Francois Legault, at a time when the fast-spreading virus was leaving the care homes desperately short of nursing staff.

Deployed to the Residence Biermans long-term care facility in Montreal on an evening shift, Bendauid said the scene awaiting him there came as a "shock": severe staff shortages, inadequate protective materials, even infected patients not wearing masks.

"The patients were dehydrated — probably hadn't had water all day," he told AFP. "I thought I would be dispensing lots of medicine, and administering medical and nursing care. Instead, my biggest contribution was giving them glasses of water."

"They had sunken eyes, dry mouths, rough tongues and chapped lips," he recalled. "We were in a long-term care center in Montreal, and people were thirsty because of a lack of personnel."

On a single day, April 19, Bendauid prepared a body for a funeral home, served meals, changed patients' diapers and distributed medicine.

"I really didn't expect to be distributing medicine," he said, adding that it was a first for him. "It's really a task usually reserved for nurses, for security reasons." He said he worried that he might make a mistake in dosage.

Jack of all trades

Etienne Desilets is a gastroenterologist by training. But since April 19, he has put in 12-hour days,

caregiving for his regular patients first, then volunteering as a nurse's aide in a retirement home, wearing a surgical mask, a protective headscarf and a light-blue lab coat.

"When the crisis began, what shocked me the most was to hear about places where they didn't have the staff to feed people," he told AFP.

He was shocked as well to learn of care facilities deserted by large numbers of staff, either because they had become infected or feared that they might be. "That pushed me to become involved, for sure," said Desilets, who has been helping at the Chartwell retirement home in Longueuil, a city south of Montreal.

In Quebec province, which alone accounts for more than half of all coronavirus fatalities in Canada, more than eight in 10 deaths have occurred in retirement homes. Hardest hit of all has been the Montreal area.

Unable to fill all the staffing vacancies in these long-term facilities — considered the "poor relations" of Quebec's healthcare system — the province has even had to call in reinforcements from the Canadian army.

"As a young doctor, I would rather go to the front myself," Desilets said. "And if I have the misfortune of catching the virus, I know the chances of serious consequences are small."

In Chartwell, this 35-year-old family man has become a jack of all trades: he helps provide care, brings meals to residents — and sometimes feeds them — and distributes medicine ... along with words of reassurance. He said he feels "supported" there and believes he is working in "safe conditions."

'Really just whatever'

In contrast, Dr. Ralph Kyrillos, a 31-year-old ophthalmologist normally attached to a hospital,



LONGUEUIL: Dr Etienne Desilets, a gastroenterologist, poses in Montreal on April 30, 2020. Desilets has been working part-time since April 19, at Chartwell Residence, a nursing home in Longueuil, south of Montreal Quebec, to help nurses. — AFP

said he was "surprised" by the management of the pandemic in Quebec's Jeffery Hale long-term care center, where he began volunteering on April 20.

"On site, the norms, the steps taken to avoid an outbreak, it's really just whatever," he said, describing how some patients were allowed to go out and walk freely around.

"I wouldn't be surprised if the whole floor ended up being positive" for COVID-19, Kyrillos said.

After his stint at the home, he returned to his hospital center, where precautions were rigidly enforced and widely respected.

But until he himself received a negative test for COVID-19, the doctor said he often worried that he might have been exposed — and might transmit the virus to his ophthalmology patients. Now he has had to put those fears aside. Kyrillos has been called to return to the Hale center later this month. —AFP

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Lifestyle | Features



This combination of pictures created on April 30, 2020 shows clowns wearing face masks during a protest to demand Mexican government aid, as they have been unable to work on the streets for the past month due to restrictions to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus COVID-19 in Mexico City.—AFP

Indian officials capture rare snow leopard, send it to zoo

A rare snow leopard captured as it savaged livestock in a remote village in the Indian Himalaya will be sent to a zoo instead of being released, officials said Sunday, triggering outrage from activists. The endangered creature was found on Saturday after it became trapped inside a pen containing sheep and goats in Giu village near the Tibetan border in India's Himachal Pradesh state. "The big cat was unable to escape from the enclosure after killing a few livestock," wildlife official Hardev Negi, who led the team that caught the snow leopard, told AFP. "The shepherd contacted us and we captured the animal in a cage."

The state's chief wildlife official Savita Sharma told AFP the snow leopard was not being released since the incident involved "wild animal-human conflict," adding it would be transferred to a zoo in the foothills outside the state capital Shimla. Officials estimated that the juvenile animal killed 43 sheep and goats in the pen over four days. There are only 44 snow leopards living in the high passes and rugged valleys of Himachal Pradesh, according to Sharma. Rajeshwar Negi, the National Convener of Nature Watch India said the decision was condemning the creature to a life without freedom.

"Don't they know how stressful it will be for the animal to be transported on a bumpy 350-kilometre long road," he told AFP. "Does it mean the snow leopard will spend the rest of its life in a zoo instead of the Himalayan wilds?" He added that the animal would also suffer in the higher temperatures at the zoo in Shimla, which is significantly warmer than its natural habitat. As few as 4,000 of the mysterious animals could be left in the high mountains of central Asia — their sole habitat — according to the World Wildlife Fund.—AFP

'King of Bollywood', Will Smith in star-studded India virus benefit

India's "King of Bollywood" superstar Shah Rukh Khan told jokes and sang for his adoring fans on Sunday during an almost five-hour online benefit to raise funds for those affected by the coronavirus pandemic. Tens of thousands of viewers watched more than 70 of the country's biggest celebrities — including cricket captain Virat Kohli and actor Khan — as well as international names such as actor Will Smith and rock legend Mick Jagger in the "I for India" show broadcast on Facebook. "I can, I will, and I must help," Khan told fans after singing a cheerful, humorous ditty about how "everything will be alright" following the deadly crisis.

Jagger and Smith spoke about the struggles of rural migrant workers, many of whom have lost their jobs and gone hungry during an ongoing nationwide lockdown imposed from late March. "They may have lost

their jobs, they may have lost their homes. They and their families may be going hungry. So I would like to ask you to donate. Please give what you can," Jagger said. Bollywood's biggest names — including Indian actress Priyanka Chopra Jonas and heartthrob Hrithik Roshan — along with local choirs and children sang or spoke passionately in English and Hindi about raising money for those in need.

Other celebrities interviewed doctors and experts about the virus and how health workers were coping on the frontlines of the pandemic. Organized by Bollywood directors Karan Johar and Zoya Akhtar, the event has so far raised 37.5 million rupees (US\$499,326) out of a target of 60 million rupees. The donations would be matched rupee-for-rupee by major philanthropic groups including the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the organizers said Sunday.

'No work, no home'
The funds will be donated to more than 100 groups providing food and other essential services during the crisis. Concert organizers said the money was needed "for those who have no work and no home and do not know where their next meal is coming from". India, the world's second-most populous nation with 1.3 billion people, late Sunday reported just over 40,000 cases of the infectious disease and 1,306 deaths. The government has hailed the weeks-long lockdown aimed at limiting the virus's spread, but the number of new daily cases has continued to gradually rise with experts calling for more virus testing.

The lockdown was extended for two weeks on Friday, but some restrictions are set to be eased from Monday in areas with fewer virus cases. Arvind Kejriwal, chief minister of New Delhi, which has the

third-highest number of virus cases among India's states and territories, said Sunday that the economic impact of the lockdown was severe in the national capital and the city needed to be reopened in non-virus "containment zones". "People are facing a lot of hardships. Jobs are going. The economic infrastructure has been hit hard," he said in an online briefing, adding that he would speak to the national government about the possibilities of opening up Delhi. "We have to start preparations so that we can learn to live with corona. Corona has now come in our country. It's not going to go anywhere."—AFP



A woman watches US actor Will Smith speaking during the 'I For India' concert live on Facebook on a television screen in New Delhi on Sunday.—AFP photos



A woman watches actor Shah Rukh Khan singing.



A woman watches actor Bollywood actor Amitabh Bachchan speaking.



A woman watches actress Madhuri Dixit signing during the 'I For India' concert.

Brazil's Salgado leads stars in Amazon COVID-19 appeal to president

Brazilian photojournalist Sebastiao Salgado has sent an open letter to far-right President Jair Bolsonaro — signed by celebrities like Brad Pitt and Madonna — calling for "urgent measures" to save the indigenous peoples of the Amazon from the coronavirus pandemic. "The indigenous peoples of Brazil face a serious threat to their own survival with the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic," said the letter, backed by an online petition which has so far gathered around 50,000 signatures.

The 76-year-old photographer has won numerous international awards for his portrayal of the poor across the world, most recently turning his focus on the peoples of the Amazon rainforest basin. "Five centuries ago, these ethnic groups were decimated by diseases brought by European colonizers," said the letter, signed by a list of celebrities including Paul McCartney,

Richard Gere and Meryl Streep. "Today with this new scourge spreading rapidly throughout Brazil," the Amazon's indigenous people "may disappear completely since they have no means of combating COVID-19."

The stars appear in a video by Brazilian director Fernando Meireles, which features Salgado calling on Bolsonaro to put an end to economic intrusion into the lives of the Amazon peoples, and to "guarantee their protection." "Brazil owes a debt to its first inhabitants. It is time to do what should have been done a long time ago," says Salgado. The Brazilian state of Amazonas, home to most of the country's indigenous people, is one of the regions worst affected by the pandemic, with more than 500 deaths to date according to the health ministry.—AFP



In this file photo Brazilian photographer Sebastiao Salgado addresses guests at the Bene Taschen gallery at his exhibition Gold in Cologne, Germany.—AFP photos

Miley Cyrus: Coronavirus is having a positive impact on the environment

Miley Cyrus believes the coronavirus pandemic is having a positive impact on the environment. The 27-year-old singer believes that as the respiratory illness forces millions of people to self-isolate in their homes, the planet is getting "a little bit of relief" when it comes to climate change, as there are currently less cars on the roads and less factories "vomiting onto Mother Nature's beauty every single day". She said: "I know some of us have seen the viral videos of bluer skies, dolphins in waters that we haven't seen them in. So Mother Nature, not only are we taking a break right now, but she's getting a little bit of relief, because there's way less cars on the freeway. People aren't working every day, so we aren't vomiting onto Mother Nature's beauty every single day."

"And we're starting to see what it would look like if we actually started treating the world more responsibly, so getting this little kind of breath of fresh air and a little vision for us to actually see physically what would happen if we actually really focused on climate change." Miley is passionate about the environment, and says her activism was triggered when she lost her home in the devastating fires that ripped through California in late 2018.

She added: "I've thought a lot about the Malibu fires. We had lost our house in the Malibu fires, and I didn't really deal with that at the time because I was filming 'Black Mirror' and came back and I had the same attitude as I do now, which was make a list of what I can change, what I can't, and accept it." "I

couldn't change that the house burned down, but I could make some changes to focus points of my activism, which is talking about climate change more." The "Slide Away" hitmaker also credits the fires with helping her to evaluate her choices in life, as she admits she doesn't regret any decisions she's made as they have led her to where she is today.



Miley Cyrus

Speaking to Zane Lowe for Apple Music, she said: "I got to focus on things that worked out and things that didn't, and what I did or could've done or didn't do. So I just, I've really been thinking a lot about my choices and how I got to where I'm sitting right now. And not all my choices are the finest, but I would do them again. I would do them again because they got me right where I am, and right now I'm connecting with people on a level that's really fulfilling, and I can't say that I've really had that over the last few years consistently. This has been consistent fulfillment."—Bang Showbiz



In this file photo a Brazilian indigenous leader takes part in a protest demanding the demarcation of indigenous lands, in Brasilia.



In this file photo members of the Tapirape tribe wait to perform a ceremonial dance for indigenous leader Cacique Raoni Metuktire (out of frame), of the Kayapo tribe, in Piaracu, a village near Sao Jose do Xingu, Mato Grosso State, Brazil.

Lifestyle | Features



Taleen Hindeleh, 20-year-old daughter of a Jordanian singer and prize-winner of a culture ministry talent contest, sings at home in the capital Amman.—AFP photos



Taleen Hindeleh plays the piano at home.



Ebaa Akroush, a 24-year-old Jordanian music graduate from the University of Jordan and first-prize winner of a culture ministry talent contest, plays the flute on his balcony in Fuheis town.

Young Jordanians on lockdown showcase 'talent from home' for hit contest

An online talent contest created to keep young Jordanians busy as they sit out their country's coronavirus lockdown has proved a hit, with thousands participating and millions watching. Mahmoud Azzazi, 22, lives in a working-class neighborhood of the capital Amman and is studying culinary arts, but has been turning his mind to music during the lockdown. He was among the prize winners for his rendition of the song "Sway", made famous by the likes of Dean Martin.

Jordan's culture ministry launched the "My talent from my home" contest in late March, and says it has since attracted more than 67,000 participants and 18 million views on social networks. With children under 16 prohibited from leaving their homes except in case of emergency, and with schools and universities still closed, the contest has provided a creative outlet for many young people. Azzazi said the win had encouraged him to work on his voice. "I hope to become a professional singer in the future," he said. Jordanian authorities imposed a strict round-the-clock curfew on March 21, with hundreds arrested in the following days for breaches.

Daytime movement restrictions have since been eased, but the curfew remains in force at night. "I want to fly, nobody can clip my wings," Taleen Hindeleh

belied out from her bedroom in Amman, in a prize-winning rendition of a song by Lebanese artist Hiba Tawaji. Contestants are divided into two groups — those aged 10 to 14 and 15 to 25. Categories include music, poetry, drawing and storytelling. Participants must post a short video on social media with the Arabic hashtag "my talent from my home", which is picked up by the culture ministry's Facebook and YouTube accounts. Five artists judge the videos — the number of views and likes on social media are considered — and Jordanian television broadcasts a selection of award-winning entries each week. Hindeleh said being in lockdown at home in Amman with her father, a professional singer, had its advantages. "He guides me and coaches me", said the 20-year-old student, who also plays piano. Jordan has officially declared 461 cases of novel coronavirus, including nine deaths.

Welcome distraction

A hundred prizes are awarded weekly, with the winners announced on television and on the culture ministry's website. Prizes range from 100 to 1,000 dinars (\$140-\$1,400) — not bad in a country where the monthly wage is around \$600. Ebaa Akroush, a 24-year-old music graduate, was one of the first-prize



Mahmoud Azzazi, 22, studying to become a chef and one of the prize winners of a culture ministry talent contest, poses for a picture at home.

winners in the contest's opening week for his performance on the flute. "I didn't expect to win because the video was poor quality", he said.

Akroush said he had initially made a short video to share with his friends, but added the hashtag after hearing about the competition. "Now people are con-

tacting me with questions about the flute", he said from his balcony in Al-Fuhais, near Amman. Locked down in Ajloun, north of the capital, 25-year-old Nabil Al-Rabadhi won a prize for his performance of "Enta omri" ("You are my life"), by legendary Egyptian singer Umm Kalthoum, played on the qanun — a stringed instrument similar to a zither.

He said he felt it was important to showcase a traditional Middle Eastern instrument, while many other contestants were using Western ones. "Thanks to the curfew, I'm spending more time playing each day", Rabadhi said. The contest is scheduled to run until Eid Al-Fitr, which marks the end of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan and this year falls later in May. And while some seek the limelight, others, young and older, are happy just to be part of the audience. Roula Al-Jmaili, a 45-year-old housewife from Amman, said the contest provided a welcome distraction from "the curfew and boredom". Issa Qaysar, a 24-year-old music arranger from Al-Fuhais, said he hoped the competition would continue. "There is great artistic talent that deserves to win and be supported", he said.—AFP

Revered Algerian singer and Berber idol Idir dies at 70

Algerian singer Idir, a leading cultural ambassador of his native Kabylie and its Berber language, died in Paris on Saturday, aged 70, his family announced. Idir, who suffered from pulmonary fibrosis, was hospitalized on Friday. "We regret to announce the death of our father (of us all), Idir," a message posted on his official Facebook account said. Contacted by AFP, his family declined to comment further. Algeria's President Abdelmajid Tebboune called him "an icon of Algerian art". "With his passing, Algeria has lost one of its monuments," Tebboune said on Twitter.

France's former president Francois Hollande also paid homage to Idir, saying he "entranced entire generations with the rhythms of his dulcet, rich and moving melodies". UNESCO praised Idir as an "eminent ambassador of the Kabylie and Berber cultures". Idir, whose real name was Hamid Cheriet, was born on October 25, 1949, in Ait Lahcene, near the Kabylie capital of Tizi Ouzou in northern Algeria. He studied to be a geologist, but in 1973 was tapped as a surprise last-minute replacement for the Kabylie diva Nouara on Radio Algiers to sing "A Vava Inouva", a lullaby set to acoustic guitar that is an ode to the rich oral traditions of Berber mountain villages. The song became hugely popular in Algeria and beyond, but Idir was unaware of its success, having been drafted for mandatory military service soon after the recording.

'Beautiful harvest'

In a 2013 interview, Idir told AFP he "came at the right time, with the right songs" that evoked the rhythms of daily life he had heard since a baby. He travelled to Paris to record his first album, also titled "A Vava Inouva", in 1975. But after a series of tours and another album, he decided to abandon the music industry, until 1991, when the release of a compilation album relaunched his career. Installed in France, he became an impassioned advocate of his native Kabylie,



In this file photo taken on April 23, 2000 Algerian singer Idir performs during the 24th Printemps de Bourges music festival.—AFP photos

while also defending multiculturalism and immigration as they became key issues in his adopted country's 2007 presidential race.

French football legend Zinedine Zidane, whose family hails from Kabylie, wrote of Idir on Instagram: "You marked my childhood... I will never forget our meeting". Algerian writer Kamel Daoud joined the praise, tweeting, "He knew how to turn our roots into such a beautiful harvest, soothing and generous." After a 38-year absence, Idir returned to Algeria in January 2018 for a Berber new year concert in the capital. The following year, he defended the popular uprisings that led to the resignation of longtime leader Abdelaziz Bouteflika. "I loved everything about these protests: the intelligence of these youths, their humor, their determination to remain peaceful," Idir said in April 2019. "I admit that these moments were like a breath of fresh air. And since I have pulmonary fibrosis, I know what I'm talking about."—AFP

'ANIMAL CROSSING' OFFERS DIGITAL GETAWAY UNDER LOCKDOWN

Millions of people are skirting global coronavirus lockdowns to stroll through public spaces, fly overseas and watch idyllic sunsets... in the virtual world of smash-hit video game "Animal Crossing: New Horizons." The leisurely land of Nintendo's latest release has struck a chord with gamers around the world, many of them yearning for a virtual escape from the onerous restrictions on movement and social activity imposed to contain the infection.



This photo shows Australian high school teacher Dante Gabriele playing Nintendo's Animal Crossing at home in Melbourne during the country's enforced COVID-19 coronavirus lockdown.—AFP

The game sees players guide their digital personas around an uninhabited island, slowly transforming the landscape with a house, garden and eventually a thriving community of adorable cartoon animal neighbors. "Right now, watching news on TV can really be scary, but in this game, it's just as if nothing is happening, it's all quiet and peaceful," said 28-year-old Kanae Miya, a Tokyo-based illustrator. Australian high school teacher Dante Gabriele said he bought the game the day after its March release and had played it for more than 30 hours each week since, with social distancing rules keeping him housebound.

"You can just play for an hour, or nine in a row, and that's why it fits so well with the lockdown — you can fit it between meetings or play all day," he told AFP. Chopping wood, harvesting turnips and fishing in the ocean give players the resources they need to build their own fantasy paradise. Real-life friends can drop in to admire the day's labors by booking an online plane ticket for their own characters, a welcome chance for social interaction at a time when regular human contact is often prohibited. Some users say they have even adopted the game's virtual island setting to stage dates organized through online dating platform Tinder, with the possibility of real-life romance stalled for now.—AFP

Broadway, doors closed and stages empty, fears an uncertain future

New York's celebrated Broadway theaters have been shuttered since March 12 and may well not reopen before September. The very real fear is that with no public funding to help them weather the crisis, some theaters may never reopen. Their neon lights still glow at night, but for nearly two months — as New York has become the US epicenter of the coronavirus pandemic — there have been no lines outside the many theaters around Times Square.

In normal times, those theaters would be taking in \$33 million a week in receipts. Now, nothing. Theater professionals received two weeks' pay when their venues closed, but now they have nothing but jobless benefits, and the chaos in New York's overwhelmed unemployment offices means many have so far received nothing. "Unfortunately, it's almost impossible for a performing musician to make money at this point," said Clayton Craddock, a drummer in the orchestra of the musical comedy "Ain't Too Proud." Base pay for most musicians or actors is around \$2,000 a week, according to several sources, though it can go considerably above that.

Adam Krauthamer, president of Local 802 of the American Federation of Musicians, said several members of the union have already died of COVID-19. Of 16 shows that were preparing to open when Governor Andrew Cuomo announced the shutdown on March 12, only two have officially dropped their plans. "It would be safe to say that there will be some that don't come back, but we don't have that information yet," said Charlotte St. Martin, who heads the Broadway League, a trade association.

Leaving matters even more in flux, there is a complete lack of certainty about when theaters might be able to reopen, with July being at the most optimistic end of projections but September appearing much more likely. And the idea, being studied by some sports organizations, of playing before empty stadiums, or before severely reduced crowds, simply wouldn't work for Broadway, the professionals say. "The financial model for Broadway is such that social distancing just won't work," St. Martin said. "A show could not maintain its bills even with houses that were 50 percent or less occupied." Plays and musical comedies are classified as mass gatherings, and "will most likely be the last thing to reopen," she said.

Further, St. Martin said, "We've got no information

yet about what it will take for mass gatherings to actually happen" — whether theater-goers might, for example, have to wear masks or have their temperature taken. "The general mood among my colleagues in regard to making a living playing music has never been darker," said Maxim Moston, a violinist in the orchestra of the musical "Moulin Rouge." "I think we're all a bit hopeless," he added. "And I think a lot of people are thinking about other careers at this point."

'The city needs Broadway'

Moston, who is also an arranger, has been working on several other projects. "I'm thinking of this as just a big reset button on life," said another Broadway musician who declined to be named. "If Broadway comes back in September and I can keep playing...and making a living that way, great," he said. "But I'm prepared for the possibility that it will be more complicated." Clayton Craddock said he is optimistic about one thing: "People will want to see live music in nightclubs, concert halls, restaurants and Broadway theaters sooner rather than later. People are starved for human interaction."

As it struggles to hold on until things begin to recover, Broadway has been mobilizing, lobbying the US Congress for support as it works out its next economic relief package. But if "it doesn't get into those packages for the workers who work on symphony orchestras on Broadway, we're just not going to make it," Krauthamer said. "I can't be any clearer." "Economically, the city needs Broadway to be alive and well, so that tourism, hotels and restaurants are all doing better," said St. Martin, who cited a study showing that Broadway contributes nearly \$15 billion to the local economy. "In order for us to remain open, for many of the shows, we will need some kind of support," she added. Another unknown: even after Broadway opens, will people be ready to return to a city so hard-hit by the pandemic? "Music will always be necessary," said Maxim Moston. But, he added, "I can envision people not wanting to come out in groups, or visit New York for a long time."—AFP



In this file photo signage of the Broadway play "The Phantom of the Opera" is pictured at Time Square in New York City.—AFP photos



In this file photo a poster outside the Broadway Theater advertises West Side Story in New York City.

IS exploits virus, political crisis to boost Iraq attacks

BAGHDAD: Islamic State group remnants in Iraq are exploiting a coronavirus lockdown, coalition troop withdrawals and simmering political disputes to ramp up deadly attacks, according to analysts and intelligence officials. The bloodiest so far was an ambush early Saturday that killed 10 Iraqi fighters north of Baghdad that observers say demonstrated a new escalation in the jihadist group's tactics but one that could still be contained.

Iraq declared IS defeated in late 2017 but sleeper cells have survived in remote northern and western areas, where security gaps mean the group wages occasional attacks. They have spiked since early April as jihadists plant explosives, fire on police patrols and launch mortars and rockets at villages, local security sources said. "Combat operations have reached a level we haven't seen in a while," said Iraqi security expert Hisham Al-Hashemi.

He said IS fighters were using abandoned villages to edge towards urban areas, looking to re-establish funding mechanisms, smuggling routes and hideouts while targeting local infrastructure and officials to cause panic. Days before early Saturday's ambush - which was multi-pronged and took place in Salahaddin province - the jihadists claimed a suicide attack that wounded four people outside an intelligence headquarters in Kirkuk, a restive northern province. An intelligence officer there said IS had tripled its attacks in Kirkuk in April compared to March.

In the rural Diyala region northeast of Baghdad, daily attacks on agricultural fields have terrified farmers and recalled memories of IS' steady build-up across Iraq. Adnan Ghabban, a tribal sheikh in the city of Baquba, said two of his relatives were shot in their fields last week by IS fighters. They both remained in a critical condition, he added. "What's happening now is taking us back to 2014," he said, referring to the year when IS seized swathes of the country in a lightning offensive.

In part, the escalation may be linked to security units being redeployed to enforce a nationwide

lockdown aimed at curbing the spread of the novel coronavirus, which has infected more than 2,000 people and killed over 90 in Iraq. "These fighters took advantage of the fact that security forces were busy with imposing the curfew and began to move around much more freely," Ghabban said.

The jihadists could also be exploiting the political deadlock in Baghdad, where top leaders are focused on tense talks over a new government, the consequences of a collapse in global oil prices and budget disputes with autonomous Kurdish authorities. "IS fighters have sensors on the political situation. Every time it deteriorates, they opportunistically increase their activity," said Fadel Abu Raghif, an Iraqi analyst focused on political and security affairs.

Abu Raghif and the Kirkuk intelligence officer said a significant troop drawdown by the 7,500-strong US-led coalition had also paved the way for IS to boost attacks. The international alliance deployed in Iraq in 2014 to help local troops defeat the jihadists by providing air strikes, advice, surveillance and combat support. Seeing that the threat from IS had "shifted", the coalition has pulled out of five Iraqi bases in recent weeks, including in Kirkuk and IS' former stronghold of Mosul.

It also redeployed hundreds of trainers out of the country indefinitely, as Iraqi security forces had halted training programs to limit possible COVID-19 transmissions. Despite years of training, the US Defense Department assessed this year that Iraqi troops were still unable to adequately collect and use intelligence in anti-IS raids on their own, or maintain operations in tough terrain without coalition help. "Without a US troop presence in Iraq, IS would likely resurge," the Pentagon's inspector general wrote.

Still, analysts and observers said the recent wave of IS attacks did not mean the group could once again threaten cities like it did in 2014. "IS will not be able to return to its former size," said Abu Raghif, meaning the UK-sized "caliphate" that the



MUKAYSHIFAH, Iraq: An Iraqi fighter with the Hashed al-Shaabi inspects the site of an Islamic State attack a day earlier on a unit of the paramilitary force on Sunday. — AFP

jihadists declared across swathes of Iraq and Syria. A senior official in the US-led coalition told AFP it had noted "successful low-level attacks" by IS in recent weeks but did not consider them a "substantial uptick".

"It's not just the number of the attacks but what's the quality of the attack? Is it complex? What equipment or tactics were used? Most of what

we've seen has been crude and elementary," the official said. Sam Heller, an independent analyst focused on jihadist groups, said the recent shift hardly compares to the peak of IS activity around the creation of the "caliphate". Instead, they were "seemingly indicative of the group's more aggressive posture, not necessarily new and impressive capabilities," he wrote. —AFP

Trump promises vaccine, sees an...

Continued from Page 1

shuttered schools need to reopen in September, Trump forecast good news on the hunt for a vaccine. "We are very confident that we're going to have a vaccine... by the end of the year," he said, admitting he was getting ahead of his own advisors with the prediction. "I'll say what I think," he said.

The businessman Republican is doing poorly in most polls ahead of the November presidential contest against Democratic challenger Joe Biden, who remains shuttered in his Delaware home. Trump faces criticism for his bruising, divisive style during a time of national calamity. He is also accused by some of botching the early response to the COVID-19 virus. Worse, the previously booming US economy, which was seen as a golden ticket to his second term, is now in dire straits due to the nationwide lockdown.

With officials saying the viral spread has begun to taper, Trump is itching to return to the campaign trail. However he faces new criticism that he is trying to declare premature victory, even as the illness continues to kill thousands of Americans every week. Having repeatedly minimized the death toll, claiming it will end at around 60,000, Trump conceded that now "I'm saying 80 or 90 and it goes up."

His emphasis, however, was not on the dead, but on resurrecting his image as a can-do leader who can end the skyrocketing unemployment caused by the lockdown. That audacious shift began Sunday at possibly the most hallowed monument in the country - the statue of Abraham Lincoln, who led the country through civil war, urged reconciliation, and was

assassinated in his moment of triumph. Trump, who calls himself a "wartime president" denied that the election will turn into a referendum on his handling of the crisis. But he added: "I hope it does because we've done a great job."

In the next few days, Trump will follow up by breaking months of self-quarantine with long-distance trips to the key electoral states of Arizona and Ohio. It's a play that will emphasize Trump's massive visibility advantage over Biden and, the White House hopes, rewrite the public relations script after gaffes including the president's suggestion that coronavirus patients ingest disinfectant.

Lincoln gambled in 1861 that only war could preserve the United States by ending slavery and restoring the nation's ideals of freedom. He won, becoming a national hero. But Lincoln is remembered as much for reaching out to former foes - something Trump did not seek to emulate as he spoke at the foot of the iconic statue.

Previous presidents, he said, were "stupid" to allow reliance on foreign manufacturers for US medicines. The Democrats, he said, are "radical", claiming they would prefer to see people get sick than see him succeed. Trump pronounced that he had "done more than any president in the history of our country in the first three years."

His self-declared greatness is questioned by many Americans. FiveThirtyEight's latest tracking poll showing only 43.4 percent approving Trump's performance and 50.7 percent disapproving. Trump even got in an online tussle with former president George W Bush earlier Sunday, after the fellow Republican posted a video filled with the kind of empathy and solidarity that many accuse the current White House occupant of failing to show. Trump responded by complaining that Bush was "nowhere to be found" when he was battling off an impeachment attempt in Congress last year. — AFP

from the amnesty, under which they were exempted from paying fines and Kuwait will pay their airfare. But only a few thousands have departed, as most countries have refused to take their nationals back under the pretext of coronavirus fears. The largest communities are Egyptians and Indians.

Meanwhile, authorities launched a campaign against visa traders who were blamed for recruiting those expats for exorbitant fees and still failed to provide them with jobs. The interior ministry has referred at least 12 cases of trafficking in persons to the public prosecution, which is investigating the cases.

Ten Kuwaiti non-governmental organizations launched a campaign called "I am responsible" with the aim to encourage citizens and expatriates to inform authorities about visa traders. The societies include Kuwait Transparency Society, Kuwait Public Funds Protection Society, Kuwait Human Rights Association and others. Leading opposition MP Shuaib Al-Muwaizri said yesterday that those who mediate in the visa trading issue are traitors, adding that he has sent questions to the interior minister about if some MPs and ministers are involved in the visa trading business.

The ministry of health urged all people placed in quarantine in their homes to abide by the quarantine rules for the sake of wellbeing of public and to also avoid legal actions taken against them. The ministry said a female citizen was transferred to mandatory quarantine after she violated home quarantine rules imposed on all citizens repatriated recently.

The health authorities are monitoring those citizens via bracelets wrapped around their wrists and connected to a smartphone application called Shlonik. The citizen, whose name was not disclosed, had a doctor's appointment but then went shopping at a cooperative society instead of heading back home, the ministry said. The ministry informed the interior ministry and she was later taken to mandatory quarantine at Jaber Hospital, after which she would be sued.

US: 'Evidence' virus came...

Continued from Page 1

Australian newspaper, The Saturday Telegraph, reported that China had deliberately suppressed or destroyed evidence about the outbreak in an "assault on international transparency" that cost tens of thousands of lives.

The report cited what it said was a 15-page dossier on the COVID-19 contagion prepared by the so-called Five Eyes intelligence agencies of the United States, Australia, Britain, Canada and New Zealand. Pompeo, a former director of the US Central Intelligence Agency, made no mention of the Five Eyes report, but said that "there is enormous evidence that this (Wuhan) is where it began."

Last week, Pompeo indicated he had not seen definitive proof. "We don't know if it came from the Wuhan Institute of virology," he said at the time. While highly critical of China's handling of the matter, Pompeo declined on Sunday to say whether he thought the virus had been intentionally released. The pandemic has so far infected more than 3.4 million people and killed more than 243,000 around the world, while also fuelling conspiracy theories about its origin.

News reports say Trump has tasked US spies to find out more about the origins of the virus, at first blamed on a Wuhan market selling exotic animals like bats. Pompeo told ABC that he agreed with a US intelligence community statement Thursday that backed "the wide scientific consensus that the COVID-19 virus was not man-made or genetically modified." But he went further than Trump, in citing "significant" and "enormous" evidence that the virus originated in the Wuhan lab.

"Remember, China has a history of infecting the

world and running substandard laboratories," Pompeo said, adding early Chinese efforts to downplay the coronavirus amounted to "a classic Communist disinformation effort. That created enormous risk." In its Thursday statement, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence said that the intel community will continue to study "whether the outbreak began through contact with infected animals or if it was the result of an accident at a laboratory in Wuhan."

The Saturday Telegraph report said the Australian government believed the virus probably originated in a so-called wet market, but that there was a five percent chance it accidentally leaked from the Wuhan lab. Some Democrats have said Trump is trying to shift blame to avoid responsibility for a slow response to the pandemic that has resulted in the US having by far the largest numbers of COVID-19 cases and deaths. "Not wanting to take responsibility as the deaths continue to mount, he blames others," Senator Patrick Leahy of Vermont said in a statement.

Trump has also been sharply critical of the World Health Organization's response to the pandemic and is suspending US financial support, saying it moved too slowly to alert the world to the gravity of the disease and was insufficiently skeptical of China's involvement. The WHO has said it wants to be invited to take part in Chinese investigations into the animal origins of the pandemic.

Several countries, including Australia, Britain, Germany and France, have joined in US calls for China to be more transparent about the coronavirus outbreak. The United States now has more than 1,134,000 COVID-19 cases and more than 66,000 deaths, according to a tally kept by Johns Hopkins University in Maryland. China now has nearly 84,000 cases and more than 4,600 deaths. After moving aggressively to lock down the region and contain the virus, Wuhan and the surrounding province of Hubei lifted restrictions on movements in late March and early April. — AFP

Kuwait police use tear gas to...

Continued from Page 1

Local newspaper Al-Qabas said some 28,000 foreigners out of estimated 160,000 without valid residencies have registered for repatriation and are being held in 34 shelters across the country. It said this included some 6,500 Egyptians, 6,300 Indians and 6,000 Bangladeshis.

Millions of expatriates, many from Asia, make up the bulk of the Gulf Arab region's labor force. Initially coronavirus cases in the region were linked to travel but Gulf Arab states have seen an increase in infections among low-income migrant workers living in overcrowded accommodations.

A large number of lawmakers declared their total support to the interior ministry and called on the security authorities to do what is necessary to maintain peace and order. MP Bader Al-Mulla said he and a number of MPs will submit a request to the Assembly to hold a special session to discuss the developments, in addition to debating the position of the foreign ministry towards embassies of countries that refuse to take their citizens back. MP Abdulkarim Al-Kandari said he will submit a draft law calling to suspend bilateral treaties and payments of loans by the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development to countries that refuse to take their citizens back.

MP Mubarak Al-Hajraf said Kuwait is providing treatment and other essentials to all without discrimination, while some countries have not dealt with Kuwait in a proper way. He called on the foreign ministry to take firm measures against countries which refuse to accept their nationals.

Around 25,000 expat workers who have been living illegally in the country have registered to benefit

Europe emerges from lockdown...

Continued from Page 1

that the virus originated in a Wuhan lab. He did not present any of that evidence. "I think the whole world can see now, remember, China has a history of infecting the world and running substandard laboratories," Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said.

The renewed anti-Chinese rumblings from Washington set financial markets on edge yesterday, as traders fretted about tensions between the world's two largest economies. Major market Hong Kong shed four percent, while other Asian bourses lost two percent, and Europe started the day in the red.

The United States has the most coronavirus deaths in the world at more 67,600. Trump had initially played down the virus, predicting the US would escape unscathed. He later warned it could cost 60,000 lives. But at a live TV event on Sunday he acknowledged a higher eventual death toll. "Look, we're going to lose anywhere from 75, 80 to 100,000 people," he said. "That's a horrible thing. We shouldn't lose one person out of this."

He forecast great leaps in prevention over the coming months. "We are very confident that we're going to have a vaccine at the end of the year, by the end of the year," he said. But, he acknowledged: "The doctors would say 'well, you shouldn't say that.' I'll say what I think."

Germany's health minister yesterday poured cold water on that optimism, saying vaccines can "take

years", describing their development as "one of the most challenging and difficult tasks in medicine". Virologists say that until there is an effective vaccine against the coronavirus, life will continue to look different, with social restrictions becoming the norm.

Many parts of Asia have, however, begun to inch towards a post-pandemic life, with schools in the Vietnamese capital Hanoi reopening yesterday after two weeks without new infections anywhere in the country. Malaysians headed back to work, while Australia and New Zealand discussed creating a "trans-Tasman bubble" that would allow travel between the two countries.

But regional heavyweight Japan extended its state of emergency to the end of the month. Japan has reported a comparatively small-scale outbreak, with 15,000 infections and 510 deaths so far, but there have been persistent fears of a spike in cases. Russia is rapidly becoming Europe's blackspot, with officials in Moscow urging residents to stay home in an effort to tamp down the growing daily tally of new cases. "The threat is apparently on the rise," Moscow mayor Sergei Sobyanin told citizens.

In parts of the continent further along the infection curve, governments were starting to get to grips with the new normal. Most are advocating continued social distancing and masks in public, as well as more testing to try to track infections. Portugal allowed small shops, hair salons and car dealers to resume business from yesterday, but ordered facemasks to be worn in stores and on public transport. Nose and mouth coverings are also mandatory on public transport in neighboring Spain. Slovenia, Poland and Hungary joined Germany in allowing public spaces and businesses to partially reopen. — AFP

Stars

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very hard

Yesterday's Solution								
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hard

STAR TRACK

Aries (March 21-April 19)
 Invitations to attend social events, perhaps business-related, could bring surprising results, Aries. You might meet more than one person who shares some of your interests, and these people could become friends. Expect some interesting practical and philosophical discussions. An opportunity to travel abroad or to a distant state might open up for you. This could prove to be a most exciting and stimulating day. Make the most of it!

Libra (September 23-October 22)
 Spiritual and intellectual matters may be very much on your mind, Libra. You're bound to be visited by inspiring thoughts. Today your mind should be clear enough to write down your insights and read the works of others to gain a deeper understanding of the subjects you hold dear. Enjoy this period of growth!

Taurus (April 20-May 20)
 While you may not have been feeling quite your usual self over the past day or two, Taurus, today you're likely to be feeling mentally and physically stronger and more focused. You could discuss new ideas for future projects, either personal or business and formulate plans of action. Your financial future could be on your mind. This is the day to look into ways to ensure it. Enjoy your day.

Scorpio (October 23-November 21)
 Although your mind may have been a bit clouded over the past few days, today the fog should clear and you'll feel more focused. Money matters might need some attention, Scorpio, and you're in just the right space to dig in and take care of them. Once practical matters are settled, however, this is a great day for spiritual studies or meditation.

Gemini (May 21-June 20)
 A date with a significant other could bring up discussions about plans for the future, Gemini. The talk could run the gamut of all your concerns, from the practical to the artistic to business to philosophical matters. The overall impact of this might be that it brings the two of you closer together. You might decide to partner on some kind of creative project.

Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)
 Stimulation that you could receive today from group affiliations might open doors to a wealth of rich experiences, Sagittarius. Your innate organizing talents may be called upon. Discussions with others lead to a new understanding of social, spiritual, or political philosophies and expand your intellectual horizons.

Cancer (June 21-July 22)
 Your phone and inbox may be blowing up with messages from friends and colleagues today, Cancer, and several fascinating subjects could come up in the course of your conversations. Some interesting ideas might come directly or indirectly from these discussions. You might want to put them to use formulating plans of action to make your future more fulfilling.

Capricorn (December 22-January 19)
 Uncertainty about professional matters can lead to an increased determination to get ahead, Capricorn, despite confusion as to how to do it exactly. It might be wise to do some research, organize all your information, and use that to formulate a plan of action. The resulting advancement may be slow-moving, but it's sure and steady.

Leo (July 23-August 22)
 Some short trips in your neighborhood and socially distanced contact with neighbors or visitors to your community could bring some interesting information your way, Leo. It gets you thinking about ways to improve your socioeconomic status and probably your professional standing. Spiritual and philosophical discussions could also take place. Remember: your insights are just as valuable as any outside information.

Aquarius (January 20- February 18)
 The opportunity to collaborate, perhaps with friends or a group you belong to, could come your way today, Aquarius. Discussions with others could lead to the confirmation of practical arrangements for problems you're trying to solve together. You might also seek to advance your education, as your intellect is especially active now.

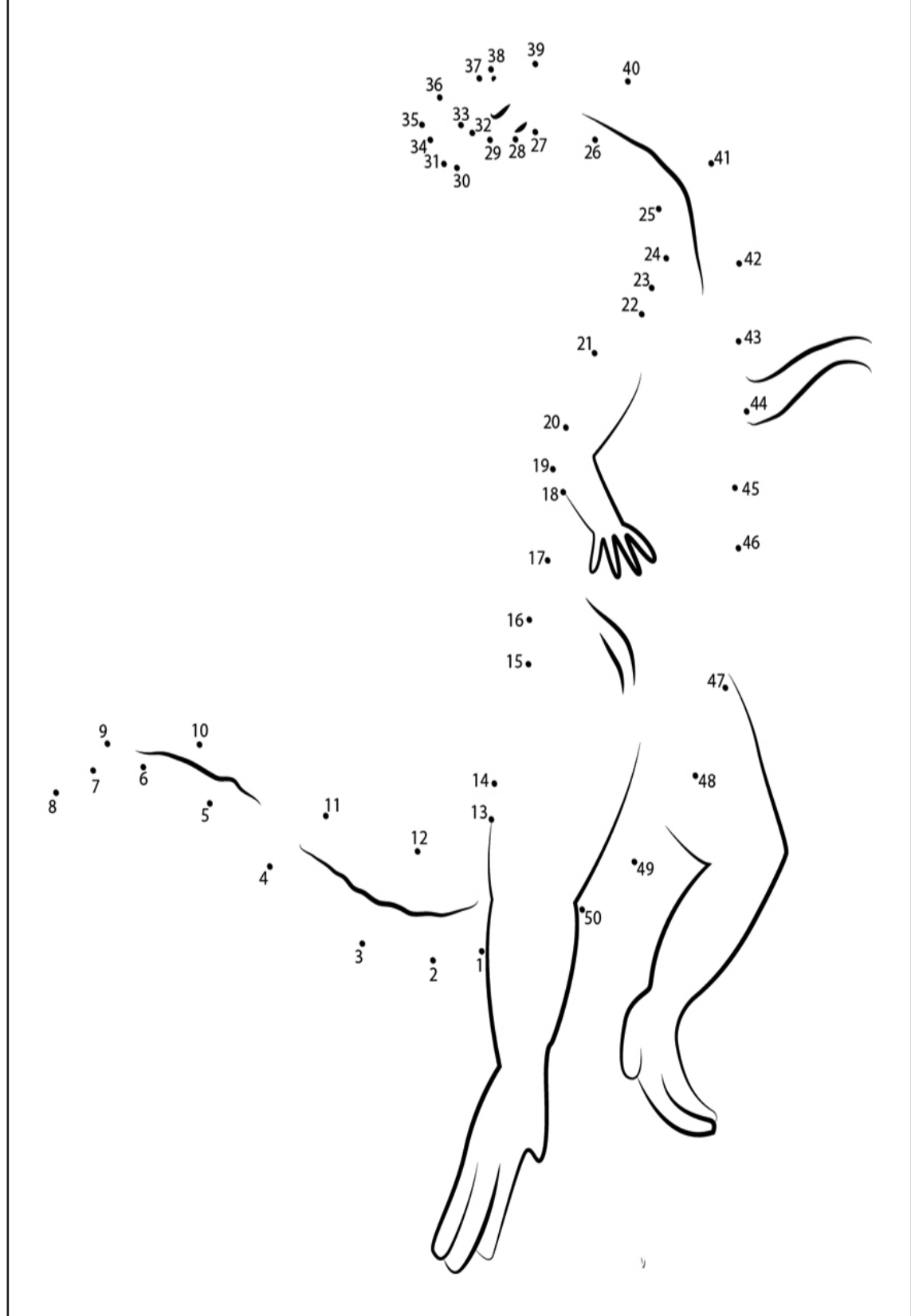
Virgo (August 23-September 22)
 You've been spending more time at home lately, and a talent for organization and interior design that you may not have been aware you have could inspire you to do some work on your immediate surroundings. Do you have art you've been meaning to hang, or a gorgeous bedspread tucked away that you forgot about? Now's the time to put them to use.

Pisces (February 19-March 20)
 An increased focus, clarity of mind, and a sense of concentration could lead to success in career matters and increased income, Pisces. Intuition can provide practical guidance to help you advance. A friend might give you some good advice concerning savings plans, investments, or more efficient uses of resources.

Find the way



Join the dots



Crossword

Candy Store



- CARAMEL
- CHOCOLATE
- GUM DROP
- HALVAH
- JELLY BEAN
- LEMON DROP
- LICORICE

- LOLLIPOP
- MARZIPAN
- NOUGAT
- PRALINE
- TAFFY
- TOFFEE
- TRUFFLE



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



Sports

Photo of the day



Professional snowboarder, Marcus Kleveland performs during training in Domb's, Norway. —Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

Froome fears Tour de France may struggle to keep fans away

LONDON: Chris Froome fears Tour de France organisers could struggle to prevent fans gathering to watch the race even if it is not open to the public because of the coronavirus. The Tour de France has been rescheduled for August 29 from its original June 27 start date, but there are still concerns about how to organise the event amid the pandemic.

The French government says no mass gatherings can take place before September, but has clarified the Tour could still go ahead on its new dates if the opening stages are managed correctly.

However, Team Ineos rider Froome, a four-time Tour de France winner, believes it will be hard to control whether crowds turn up. "For sure we can put the race on without people standing on the roads and fans in that sense," Froome told former England cricketer Kevin Pietersen on an Instagram Live chat.

"I mean, we can put on the race and it can be broadcast on television. You're not going to get the same scenes as you would get going through these tunnels of just people everywhere and all the rest of it."

"Maybe that's the version of race we need to see this year. I don't know. In theory, we can put the race on but I think the bigger question is would the organisers be able to keep people from actually coming out and gathering in large crowds? I think that's the bigger question."

Froome, 34, missed last year's Tour de France after suffering serious injuries in a crash. He has been hitting the gym every day during lockdown to try and replicate what he would be doing this time of the year in preparation for the Tour.

"Some days I'm even doing up to six hours sitting on the stationary trainer - big days," he said. "Obviously I'm coming off the back of a big injury now as well. A lot of the training I've been doing up until this point has been indoors already, so it's almost prepared me in a way for this whole lockdown period." —AFP

Beryl Burton, many still regard as Britain's greatest female cyclist

Burton and her daughter Denise raced against each other

LONDON: One September day in the Yorkshire Dales back in 1967, a handful of women riders set out behind 99 men to compete in a 12-hour time trial organised by Otley Cycling Club.

One of them happened to be Beryl Burton, who many still regard as Britain's greatest female cyclist, and what transpired throughout that long day helped explode the myth that women lacked the aerobic endurance to challenge men. Picking off male riders as if she was shelling peas, the relentless 30-year-old clocked up 277.25 miles — not just setting a British women's record that lasted 50 years, but a men's one too.

With two hours remaining Burton, whose husband Charlie spent the day delivering snacks including a nip of brandy from his support car, caught and passed leading male rider Mike McNamara (who had started two minutes ahead of her).

In one of British sport's best-loved anecdotes, Burton is reputed to have glanced across at the struggling McNamara, who incidentally broke the men's record by completing 276.52 miles, and offered a consolatory Liquorice Allsort.

It was not the first time Burton, born near Leeds, in 1937, humbled the men. A year earlier she won the British 100-mile championships in a time that was 38 seconds quicker than the men's champion from a week earlier on exactly the same course.

In a TV documentary in 1986, one young male rider remarked: "You only ever see one view of her and that's a rear view. She goes by."

Burton was introduced to cycling by Charlie, who she married in 1955. "She was handy but not that competent, slowly she got better," he said of her early days on two

wheels. In 1957 she was second in the national 100-mile time trial championships — the first medal in a collection that eventually could have filled a small house.

From the age of 19 to 39 she won 96 national titles, the women's road world title in 1960 and 1967 and the world individual pursuit track title in 1959, 1960, 1962, 1963 and 1966. In 1963 she became the first woman to break the hour barrier for the 25-mile time trial.

Burton won Britain's best all-rounder time trial competition (25, 50 and 100 miles) 25 years in succession.

Never one to court publicity, the lack of attention paid to women's cycling at the time still grated.

"It might as well have been the ladies' darts final down at the local as far as Britain was concerned," she said after her world title ride in Leipzig in 1960.

Sadly for Burton, women's cycling did not enter the Olympics until 1984 and it was another decade before a women's TT was included in the world championships. Who knows how much else the humble housewife from Yorkshire, who never received a penny in sponsorship,

would have achieved?

British Cycling president Bob Howden says Burton's record of beating men could qualify her as the world's greatest athlete. Growing up nearby in Wakefield, he competed against her and says she is the reason he entered the sport. "I was a spotty 13-year-old and was riding home from football one day and got caught by Beryl coming home, complete with saddlebag and everything," he told Reuters. "I instantly recognised her as she was world champion. I couldn't resist jumping past her but she just flew me back and left me. We carried on like that for a few miles and eventually she said 'if you think you're that



Beryl Burton

bloody good join a cycling club'. And I did. That's why I am where I am now I guess."

Burton's childhood was beset by ill health and she spent nine months in hospital after a bout of rheumatic fever when aged 11. Years spent picking rhubarb in Britain's so-called 'rhubarb triangle' helped build her legendary endurance.

Burton passed on her love of cycling to her daughter

Denise and they even raced against each other.

Nothing perhaps illustrates her fierce competitiveness than the 1976 nation road championships when Denise, then 20, beat her mum, who could not bring herself to congratulate her.

She rode a bike to the end, literally. In 1996, while out on her bike delivering invites for her 59th birthday, she suffered a heart attack and died. —Reuters

Varner has no fears about getting back on the PGA Tour bus

TEXAS: Harold Varner III is getting impatient to play professional golf again, and has no qualms about jumping straight back into the water when the PGA Tour resumes next month amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

While some players have expressed reticence to commit to competing again until they know details of the tour's plan to test for the novel coronavirus, Varner is not among them. The PGA Tour is scheduled to restart without spectators with the Charles Schwab Challenge in Fort Worth, Texas from June 11-14. It will be among the first professional sporting bodies in the United States to resume after shutting down on March 12.

"Someone's got to start somewhere or we're going to put ourselves in a hole we can't get out of," Varner said in a telephone interview with Reuters, referring to the general economy rather than golf specifically.

"The economy and everything, if we stop for six months it's going to be hard to get going. Pros will be fine but there's going to be a trickle-down effect. You're seeing businesses that aren't making it for two months that we've been gone. If we did this for six months it's going to get everybody."

The tour has said it wants to test all players for coronavirus when it resumes, but has not been specific about its exact plans. In a recent Golf Digest survey of 35 players, slightly more than half said they would be prepared to compete only if a comprehensive testing plan is in place at every tournament.

HOME DRIVING RANGE

Varner has been keeping busy since the tour suspended its season. The North Carolina native moved into a new house in Charlotte late last year and he has also bought a 16-acre (six-hectare) property nearby for his parents, with a driving range to boot.

"I've been hanging out there a lot over this break," he said. "Have got a bundle of toys like tractors, plenty of things to do, an indoor place to hit, everything you can think of."

"I've been practicing a decent amount."

He's also found time for turkey hunting and exchanging the occasional text with North Carolina's most famous son, basketball great Michael Jordan.

Varner is contracted to wear Jordan Brand shoes and apparel.

Now he is ready to get back onto the road, even if he has to pull his own clubs if the tour bans caddies from handing them to players, which it has been speculated it will do to reduce the chances of anyone contracting coronavirus.

"I don't really care. It wouldn't be the first time," said the 29-year-old, who won the 2016 Australian PGA Championship.

Still seeking his first PGA Tour victory, he has knocked on the door a few times, most recently at the Genesis Open in Los Angeles, where he was one stroke from the lead starting the final round before finishing 13th.

"I'll do whatever it takes to get back to playing," Varner said. "I'll play everything until the new year. That's what I do. What am I going to do, sit at home? I've been sitting home the last six weeks." —Reuters

Ringside doctors back off call for combat sports ban

LOS ANGELES: After calling for an indefinite ban on combat sports events in April, the Association of Ringside Physicians (ARP) wants coronavirus precautions to be developed with an eye to staging events.

In a weekend statement on the group's website, the doctors who train and certify ringside boxing and mixed martial arts doctors worldwide updated their stance based on the relaxing of stay-at-home requirements.

"Although it is impossible to eliminate all risk associated with COVID-19, precautions can be made to reduce the risk of viral transmission," the statement said. "Many athletic commissions, organizations and promoters are developing new guidelines to limit exposure to all involved at events, including athletes, their teams, commission personnel and support staff."

Sports worldwide have been shut down by the coronavirus pandemic. But three Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) cards have been scheduled in Jacksonville, Florida, the first on Saturday with others on May 13 and May 16 — all to be staged in an arena with television broadcast personnel but without spectators.

"Combat sports event procedures regarding COVID-19 precautions should be actively developed, regularly reviewed and modified based on the evolving knowledge and scientific evidence put forth by public health authorities," the ARP said.

"These guidelines should also involve local and regional public health officials as well as infectious disease experts and epidemiologists." An executive order last month from Florida governor Ron DeSantis opened the door to hosting UFC events by giving essential services status to "employees at a professional sports and media production with a national audience... if the location is closed to the general public." —AFP

Sports

Saudi plans for Newcastle may not be on scale of Man City transformation

Proposed takeover is now being reviewed

DUBAI/MANCHESTER: A bid by a Saudi Arabian state fund to secure ownership of Newcastle United is drawing scrutiny, but even if it succeeds it is unlikely that the petrodollars will transform the Premier League club into a powerhouse in the near future.

The prospect of the Saudi bid fuelling a rapid rise to the top, in the manner of Manchester City's four title successes under owners from the United Arab Emirates, has thrilled many Newcastle fans, but several analysts believe that the investment impact may not be on such a scale.

A group fronted by British financier Amanda Staveley, with an expected 80% investment from the Saudi sovereign wealth fund PIF and 10 percent involvement from billionaire brothers David and Simon Reuben, have made a reported 300 million pound (\$375 million) bid to buy the club from British businessman Mike Ashley. The proposal faces some early obstacles and the prospect of Saudi ownership of a top English club has been condemned by human rights groups.

Saudi Arabia was internationally criticised after the 2018 murder of prominent Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the kingdom's Istanbul consulate, the Yemen war and the detention of several women's rights activists. Added to that there is the long-running dispute with Qatari company BeInSport regarding allegations of Saudi tolerance of 'pirate' broadcasts in the kingdom — an issue which has been raised by some parliamentarians in the UK. The proposed takeover is now being reviewed as part of the Premier League's "owners' and directors' test", which was previously known as the 'fit and proper person's test'.

Investors wanting to become owners of English professional clubs have to show they have no unspent

criminal conviction for fraud, are not bankrupt, and have not been banned from serving as a company director. Newcastle supporters, however, are mostly excited at the prospect of major investment in their team, which has not featured in the Champions League since 2004 and has not won the English title since 1927 or FA Cup since 1955, despite claiming one of the country's largest fan bases.

The timing of the bid, though, is far from ideal — the Premier League is currently suspended due to the coronavirus pandemic. On Friday, Moody's Investors Service cut Saudi Arabia's outlook to "negative" from "stable", saying the oil price crash has raised fiscal risks for the Gulf nation.

"It is a relatively risky undertaking at a time when it looks like the kingdom will need a lot of liquid assets to finance deficits and maintain its currency peg," says Steffen Hertog, Associate Professor in Comparative Politics at the London School of Economics.

It's a risky undertaking

IMPROVING INFLUENCE

Hertog, like a number of observers, believes the Saudi involvement is aimed at improving the country's influence and image outside of its borders but says economic realities may limit PIF's ambitions.

"It definitely is part of an Abu Dhabi style soft power strategy, but I am not sure how much extra money they will pour into the club. Given current fiscal developments and the travails of some of the PIF's other assets, there are likely to be constraints to Saudi generosity," he said.

Manchester City's UAE owners have been closely involved in the major decision-making at the club with Khaldoon Al Mubarak chairman since September 2008 but that path may not be followed by the Saudis.



The Saudi-led £300m takeover of Newcastle United has to pass one final hurdle, the Premier League's owners and directors test, before the deal is completed.

"PIF does not have the experience or capacity to be 'hands on' so would likely take a back seat," says Neil Quilliam, CEO of Gulf-focused consultancy Castlereagh Associates.

Saudi Finance Minister Mohammed al-Jadaan addressed, in a television interview on Saturday, the issue of investments abroad, without directly mentioning PIF's potential bid for Newcastle.

"The investments are highly important because they have returns we can use in case of a crisis to curb the deficit. If we use the reserves, we consume the assets and won't have any returns.

"Also, these types of crises create investment opportunities. Many companies reduce their investments, which creates opportunities to invest in them," he told

Al Arabiya news channel.

PIF manages over \$300 billion in assets. It has been in existence since 1971, but became a more active investor since 2015 when it started reporting to a high-level economic body headed by the kingdom's de facto ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

PIF has been tasked with delivering on Prince Mohammed's ambitious economic transformation drive to reduce the kingdom's reliance on oil revenues.

The fund is headed by former Saudi banker Yasir al-Rumayyan, whose title is governor and is seen as close to Prince Mohammed.

Financial sources have told Reuters that the crown prince had a say on many strategic PIF decisions, such as Softbank's Vision fund investment. — Reuters

Bowler Shami considered suicide

NEW DELHI: India fast bowler Mohammed Shami has revealed how he thought of committing suicide while struggling with personal problems before making a spectacular comeback to the national side.

Shami battled weight issues, injury and a legal quarrel with his estranged wife before a stellar performance at the World Cup last year re-established the 29-year-old as a key player. With cricket and sports halted in the coronavirus lockdown, Shami opened up about his own and his family's fears to teammate Rohit Sharma during an exchange on Instagram.

"I think if my family had not supported me back then I would have lost my cricket. I thought of committing sui-

cide three times during that period due to severe stress," said Shami. "I was not thinking about cricket at all. We were living on the 24th floor. They were scared I might jump from the balcony."

Shami's contract with the Board of Control for Cricket in India was withheld in 2018 because of allegations of domestic violence, only to be reinstated later.

The bowler also struggled with injury that saw him spend nearly a year on the sidelines, leading to weight gain. He said his family and friends helped him bounce back. "My two or three friends used to stay with me for 24 hours (during my days of depression). My parents asked me to focus on cricket to recover from that phase and not think about anything else," he said.

"I started training then and sweated it out a lot at an academy in Dehradun. Then my family explained that every problem has a solution no matter how big the problem. My brother supported me a lot." A lean and hungry Shami made a strong comeback in the Indian team at the 50-over World Cup. He



Mohammed Shami

took 14 wickets in four games including a match-winning hat-trick.

Shami has claimed 180 wickets in 49 Tests and 144 scalps in 77 one-day internationals since making his debut for India in 2013. Last year Shami led the pace pack in the absence of yorker

king Jasprit Bumrah and claimed 13 wickets during India's 3-0 home Test sweep of South Africa. Skipper Virat Kohli heaped praise on the fast bowler, saying, "he is someone who can change the complexion of the match totally when you don't see it coming". — AFP

Sport bids to step out of virus shadow

PARIS: Sports' big ticket events, the 2020 Olympics, European football championships, Wimbledon and the British Open golf tournament have gone to the wall due to the coronavirus. However, there are some shoots of recovery as sports worldwide make tentative plans to return to action.

AFP Sport looks at what we know so far with the major events:

FOOTBALL

- English Premier League, which still has 92 games to play, has reconfirmed their commitment to finish the season. But matches would be behind closed doors and reportedly at up to 10 neutral venues. Liverpool are on the brink of a first league title for 30 years with a 25-point lead at the top of the table.

- Horst Seehofer, the German minister for the interior and sport, said he supports a resumption of the season despite three people testing positive for coronavirus at Bundesliga club Cologne. A resumption would not be possible before May 16. A final decision is expected Wednesday.

- In Spain, La Liga is reportedly planning to start testing players for the coronavirus between Tuesday and Thursday, after which they would then be able to resume individual training programmes within 48 hours.

- Italy's footballers can now take part in individual training sessions as the strictest coronavirus lockdown measures begin to ease. But Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte will only allow teams to resume organised group activities on May 18.

- South Korea look certain to have the honour of being the first league back in action. The season will start on May 8 but behind closed doors.

- In France, Paris Saint-Germain were declared Ligue 1 champions after French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe announced professional sport could not resume before September.

- The Dutch football federation called an end to their season on April 24.

CRICKET

- The English season will not start until July 1 at the earliest and likely behind closed doors. The new Hundred tournament has been scrapped until 2021. However, England could begin their rescheduled three-Test series against the West Indies on July 8.

- The series was originally due to start on June 4 at the Oval. Australia and Pakistan are still due to tour later in the summer.

- The money-spinning IPL, which should have started on March 29, was postponed but media reports said the BCCI may aim for a tournament in September-October, ahead of the T20 World Cup in Australia.

TENNIS

- The ATP and WTA will not resume tournament play until July 13 at the earliest.

- The French Open at Roland Garros has already been moved to Sept 20-Oct 4 although there are suggestions that it may even be put back by a further week.

- The United States Tennis Association will decide mid-June whether or not the US Open will take place in New York.

- Low-key action has returned with an eight-man exhibition competition in the tiny town of Hoehr-Grenzhausen in Germany. The series does not have spectators, ball boys or line judges.

- Patrick Mouratoglou, the coach of Serena Williams, says he is planning a league of 50 matches at his academy near Nice in the south of France with "millions of US dollars in prize money". It will be broadcast live under the title "Ultimate Tennis Showdown" starting on the weekend of May 16.

MOTOR SPORT

- After 10 races were either cancelled or postponed, Formula One hopes to open its season in Austria with back-to-back races on July 5 and 12.

- NASCAR in the United States will return on May 17 at Darlington Raceway, the first of four oval races over 11 days.

- MotoGP, with eight races already off, is scheduled to return on August 9 at Brno in the Czech Republic. — AFP

Hundred delay will rob women's game of momentum

LONDON: Women's cricket risks losing momentum after the launch of The Hundred competition was postponed until next year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, former England captain Charlotte Edwards said.

The women's Twenty20 World Cup in Australia proved a massive success this year with an 86,000-plus crowd watching the hosts beat India in the March 8 final in Melbourne. The global health crisis has since halted professional cricket and the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) last week decided to postpone The Hundred, which was scheduled to begin in mid-July.

The innovative franchise-based league includes an American sports-style draft and features eight city-based men's and women's teams with names such as London Spirit, Manchester Originals and Trent Rockets. "There are so many mixed emotions really," Edwards, who led England to Twenty20 and one-day World Cup titles in 2009, told BBC World Service.

"Obviously it's the right decision but it was such an important year for women's cricket on the back of the hugely successful World Cup in Australia, where nearly 90,000 people watched the game. "We just really felt the momentum was with the women's game and we were also going to introduce contracts this summer for 40 professional cricketers, and it's all been put on hold at the moment," the 40-year-old said.

For several uncontracted female cricketers in England, the new league was to be their only source of income this year. "A lot of players were hoping to have contracts for the Hundred, which were quite lucrative for some of them, and everyone's going to miss out which is so unfortunate and at such an important time for women's cricket," Edwards said. The ECB still plans to award 40 new full-time contracts at some stage as part of a plan to invest 20 million pound (\$24.9 million) in the women's game. "We have been guaranteed that the ECB will still go ahead with their 20 million pound investment into the women's game, which is something that is obviously keeping us all going at the moment," Edwards said. — Reuters

Snell sweeps Giolito, wins first MLB The Show Players title

WASHINGTON: Tampa Bay Rays star and Cy Young hurler Blake Snell swept pitcher Lucas Giolito of the Chicago White Sox on Sunday to claim the inaugural MLB The Show Players League title in dominating fashion.

Snell claimed the best-of-five World Series 5-1, 3-2, 6-0 on his to winning 26 of his final 29 matchups overall. Snell lost just once over his three playoff series. For a player who is steadfastly stingy on the real mound, Snell posted a league-leading 145 runs during the regular season of the Players League.

"Usually I'm super-aggressive in this league," Snell told MLB.com regarding his approach at the plate going into the third game. "But facing Lucas, I know he's getting a lot better, and I knew I had to be a lot more patient. Once he starts to learn how to hit better, he's gonna be nasty. I was happy I was able to play him now, because he's gonna be really good."

"I haven't faced many hitters like Blake," Giolito added. "He just sees the ball really well. It was an offensive onslaught, and it was too much to overcome. He's very, very good at this." Snell got off to a fast start in the Series, slugging a leadoff home run with Willy Adames in Game 1 against Giolito. He followed that up with HRs by Mike Zunino and Austin Meadows to cruise to the 5-1 win.

Though Snell took the title, he did not win the Best Player Award. That went to Joey Gallo, the No. 2 seed who suffered a stunning upset at the hands of seventh-seeded Ian Happ in the quarterfinals. Gallo earned 39.8 percent of the fan vote and 10 from his fellow competitors. Snell came in second.

Gallo also earned Best Cameo for his own virtual player slugging 13 home runs in 48 at-bats and posting a 1.814 OPS. The Best Twitch Name went to Bo Bichette's "BoFlows" nickname. Bichette took 24.8 percent of the fan vote and six from his peers.

Dwight Smith Jr. of the Orioles took home Best Manager award for doing more with less. Smith finished 19-10 and qualified for the postseason despite an O's team with a 69 overall rating. Smith earned 34.2 of the fan vote and eight player votes.

Brett Phillips of the Kansas City Royals won Most Entertaining Streamer despite not winning the fan vote; Aaron Hicks won In-Game MVP after mashing 14 home runs and a 2.369 OPS in 29 regular-season games for teammate Tommy Kahnle, how represented the Yankees in the tournament.

Best Reaction Goer to Rhys Hoskins of the Phillies and Cole Tucker of the Pirates. In their game, Tucker told Hoskins that he would name his first-born child after him if he hit a home run in his next at-bat. Hoskins sent the next pitcher into the left-field seats. — Reuters

18 Beryl Burton, many still regard as Britain's greatest female cyclist



19 Saudi plans for Newcastle may not be on scale of Man City transformation



19 Indian bowler Shami considered suicide



SFA vice-president Mike fears 'total disaster'

cancelling next domestic season due to coronavirus



Scottish Football Association (SFA) vice-president Mike Mulraney.

GLASGOW: Scottish Football Association (SFA) vice-president Mike Mulraney said on Sunday he fears the governing body might face the "total disaster" scenario of cancelling the next domestic season due to the coronavirus.

The Scottish Professional Football League has abandoned the remainder of the current Championship, League One and League Two seasons after a lengthy and controversial process.

There is no decision yet on how to finish the rest of the 2019-20 Scottish Premiership campaign, but it would be no surprise if it is called off after the French and Dutch leagues were abandoned because of the

pandemic. Now Mulraney, who is also chairman of second tier Alloa, says the SFA are planning for potential situations that include restricted fan access and a campaign behind closed doors — if the 2020-21 season can begin at all.

And he warned it would be "foolhardy" not to face up to the possibility of Scottish clubs going out of business during the health crisis.

"We have run some pretty stark realities we think are real, meaningful and, if not probable, possible," Mulraney told BBC Radio Scotland's Sportsound programme.

"We have three main visions we see we have to

deal with as a club. One is a very restricted fanbase, which we think is a possibility. "The second is how we would run a season without fans, and then it's the total disaster scenario which we have to look at as a club, which is what if we can't play football for another season? "The last one is the one you have to look at because right now we can't play football."

On the prospect of playing without fans, Mulraney said: "It would be incredibly difficult, there's no point pretending otherwise. We have run the numbers at Alloa and think we could probably do one season with no fans.

"Football is the fans but if it requires us to do

something like this to ensure we have a football product at the end of it, we have to look at how we give media partners content."

After SFA chief medical officer Dr John MacLean admitted the game was likely to remain suspended until September or October, Mulraney added: "We have to give ourselves the best chance but I would not say I expect Alloa Athletic to be playing football in August or September.

"We need to create an environment where we give answers to the public, players, fans, staff and, critically, our government, to allow them to have confidence to restart football in Scotland." — AFP

SANZAAR slams 'misleading' reports on trans-Tasman rugby

SYDNEY: Southern hemisphere rugby body SANZAAR shot down reports that Australia and New Zealand would shift to organising trans-Tasman games after the coronavirus crisis, criticising "misleading information and speculation" yesterday.

Talk has been circulating about possible trans-Tasman fixtures after neighbours New Zealand and Australia, which have both seen significant drops in new infections, started easing strict lockdown rules.

SANZAAR, which groups South Africa, New Zealand, Australia and Argentina, and administers the Rugby Championship Test series and the Super Rugby club tournament, said none of the member nations had agreed on any new competition formats.

"Having spoken with my SANZAAR board members, I can confirm that none of the suggested models or structures that have been commented on recently, such as standalone Trans-Tasman formats, have been agreed by any of the SANZAAR unions individually or collectively," SANZAAR CEO Andy Marinus said in a statement. "All such reports are merely speculative and have no basis to them." On Tuesday, New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern will join an Australian leaders' meeting to discuss establishing a "trans-Tasman bub-

ble" that allows them to lift bilateral coronavirus travel bans. However, SANZAAR said its members would have to agree on any changes, adding that a 14-team Super Rugby competition and a four-nation Rugby Championship had already been sold to broadcasters from next year. "Any changes to the Super Rugby structure this year and into the future are matters that are currently being discussed in detail by all the joint-venture, national union stakeholders: Argentina, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa," the statement said.

"The stakeholders are all committed to the joint-venture through to 2030 and once consensus is agreed upon by all the stakeholders it will then be communicated by the SANZAAR board."

SANZAAR said this year's Super Rugby competition is likely to have "a strong domestic focus in each territory given the travel, border and government restrictions that we believe we will have to adhere to".

Marinus added that SANZAAR is having "realistic discussions on what may have to eventuate should COVID-19 restrictions continue beyond 2020". "We are presently looking in detail at various competition formats but any agreed format will include teams from all four stakeholder national unions," he said. — AFP

FINA postpones Fukuoka world championships

TOKYO: Swimming's world governing body FINA rescheduled the 2021 Fukuoka aquatics world championships to May 2022 yesterday to avoid a clash with the postponed Tokyo Olympics.

The new dates for the swimming event in the Japanese city are May 13-29, 2022. "After liaising with the relevant stakeholders and receiving feedback from them, we have no doubt that the decision taken will provide the best possible conditions for all participants at the championships," said FINA president Julio Maglione.

"At a time of unprecedented uncertainty, FINA hopes the announcement of these dates will allow for some clarity in planning for all concerned." Lausanne-based FINA had to move the championships because the 2021 slot of July 16 to Aug. 1 clashed with the new date for the Tokyo Games, which were postponed due to the

COVID-19 pandemic.

The switch after consultation with broadcasters, athletes and national federations follows similar moves by athletics and soccer for the world championships in Oregon and women's European soccer championship respectively.

Soichiro Takashima, the mayor of Fukuoka, said there would be no reduction in the competition schedule. "Of course, due to lingering COVID-19 fears here in Fukuoka City, we still cannot let our guard down," added the mayor.

"However, we will continue to exert our utmost efforts to eliminate COVID-19 as early as possible to meet the expectations of the many athletes and sports fans longing for the opening of our championships, and to make the event a great success."

The swimming body said its World Masters Championships will also take place across the island of Kyushu from May 31-June 9, 2022. Swimming's new date also avoids any overlap with the 2022 Commonwealth Games, due to be held in the British city of Birmingham from July 27 to Aug. 7.

There had been fears that a clash would deny British fans the chance to see current Olympic and world breaststroke champion Adam Peaty going for gold at home. — Reuters