



3 Precautionary measures pave way for restoring normal life



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Ramadan KAREEM

Imsak	03:25
Fajr	03:35
Dhuhr	11:45
Asr	15:20
Maghrib	18:27
Isha	19:52



Kuwait reports record 526 new coronavirus cases

Amendments approved to allow salary cuts • Kuwait donates \$40m to WHO

International investor in negotiations with Al Khair Global to acquire 5% of Gulf Cable



Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi

KUWAIT: Al Khair Global, owned by Kuwaiti businessman Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi, announced that its ownership goal of its stake in Gulf Cable & Electrical Industries Company has changed from 'acquisition' to 'partial sale'. A renowned international investor is seeking to purchase 5 percent of Gulf Cable for an undisclosed amount. Negotiations have entered an advanced stage, with Al Khair Global keen on following the proper



regulatory channels and complying with Capital Markets Authority directives.

Gulf Cable has witnessed strong performance and development, reliably meeting shareholder expectations as the only commercial entity in Kuwait that produces and exports electric cables as well as control, communications and public transport cables. The investment of a new strategic partner will likely aid in new initiatives and international growth. Al-Kharafi will remain the majority shareholder.

The book value of the company is nearly KD 140 million, with the execution of a series of contracts and projects expected to earn tens of millions of dinars in new revenue including a KD 6.3 million contract to provide low voltage cables to the Ministry of Electricity and Water signed in April.

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The ministry of health reported on Tuesday 526 new coronavirus (COVID-19) infections in the last 24 hours, bringing the tally to 5,804 cases. During its daily briefing, Health Ministry Spokesperson Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said 90 patients are in intensive care, 31 of them in critical condition. Those currently receiving treatment at hospitals have reached 3,732 patients, he added. Earlier, Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah announced the recovery of 85 patients, taking the total to 2,032 recoveries.

The Cabinet on Monday approved in principle key amendments to the labor law in the private sector that allows employers to reduce salaries based on mutual agreement with employees. MPs quickly warned the government against any legislative changes that could undermine the rights of Kuwaiti citizens employed in the private sector.

MPs Abdulwahab Al-Babtain, Yousef Al-Fadhlah and Nasser Al-Dossari and others said they will strongly oppose any move to change the law to allow reducing the salaries of Kuwaitis in the private sector. The lawmakers however did not make any specific reference to expatriate employees, who make up over 97 percent of the private sector workforce.

Under the current labor law amended in 2010, companies have no right under any circumstances to reduce the salaries of their staff even with their con-

Updates on COVID 19 Tue. 5/05/2020



sent, and any action like this is considered null and void by Kuwaiti courts. So, the only option for companies is to terminate the services of their staff, pay full indemnity and benefits and then reappoint them on new wages.

MP Ahmad Al-Fadhli said he will submit a draft law stipulating to allow a compromise - like the government amendment - in order to allow employees to

Continued on Page 16

Repatriation of Indians in Kuwait begins May 8

By Sajeev K Peter

KUWAIT: The first flight of Indians from Kuwait carrying 200 evacuees is scheduled to leave for Hyderabad on May 8 as part of the first phase of an evacuation plan chalked out by the Indian government in the wake of a global crisis triggered by the coronavirus pandemic.

In the first phase, starting May 7 and spanning seven days, the Indian government will fly home around 12,800 'distressed' citizens from many countries including Gulf states on 64 flights. The government has drawn a detailed plan in accordance with standard operating protocol (SOP) to evacuate non-resident Indians (NRIs) stranded abroad on compelling

Continued on Page 16



KUWAIT: Egyptians finally leave Kuwait yesterday after the Egyptian government agreed to take them back. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat



NAJAF, Iraq: A Kuwaiti stranded in Iraq due to the coronavirus pandemic holds up his passport while boarding a Jazeera Airways flight to Kuwait at Najaf International Airport yesterday. — AFP

WHO: No proof on Wuhan lab claims from US

GENEVA: The World Health Organization said Monday that Washington had provided no evidence to support "speculative" claims by the US president that the new coronavirus originated in a Chinese lab. "We have not received any data or specific evidence from the United States government relating to the purported origin of the virus - so from our perspective, this remains speculative," WHO emergencies director Michael Ryan told a virtual briefing.

Scientists believe the killer virus jumped from animals to humans, emerging in China late last year, possibly from a market in Wuhan selling exotic animals for meat. Top US epidemiologist Anthony Fauci echoed the WHO's statement in an interview published Monday evening by National Geographic.

"If you look at the evolution of the virus in bats and what's out there now, (the scientific evidence) is very, very strongly leaning toward this could not have been artificially or deliberately manipulated,"

Fauci told the magazine. "Everything about the stepwise evolution over time strongly indicates that (this virus) evolved in nature and then jumped species," he said.

US President Donald Trump, increasingly critical of China's management of the outbreak, claims to have proof it started in a Wuhan laboratory. And US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Sunday said "enormous evidence" backed up that claim, although the US intelligence community last week said it would continue to study whether the outbreak stemmed from infected animal contact, or a lab accident. China has vehemently denied suggestions the lab was the source.

"Like any evidence-based organization, we would be very willing to receive any information that purports to the origin of the virus," Ryan said, stressing that this was "a very important piece of public health information for future control. "If that data and evidence is available, then it will be for the United States government to decide whether and when it can be shared, but it is difficult for the WHO to operate in an information vacuum in that regard," he added.

The UN health agency - which has also faced scathing criticism from Trump over accusations

Continued on Page 16

Virus deaths top 250,000; billions pledged for job

WASHINGTON: The global death toll from the coronavirus pandemic topped a quarter of a million yesterday, with the US government predicting a further surge in fatalities as an international vaccine drive garnered \$8 billion in pledges. The dire forecast from the United States came as much of the Western world emerged from weeks of lockdown, with hopes that the disease may have peaked in Europe after nearly two months of confinement.

But the global progress did little to cool a war of words between the US and China - fueled by American claims the virus originated in a Chinese laboratory, a theory the World Health Organization (WHO) labelled "speculative". An AFP tally of official figures showed Europe is the hardest-hit continent with around 145,000 fatalities. The US has recorded close to 68,700. Together they account for more than 85 percent of global deaths.

Since the disease first surfaced in China late last

year the number of confirmed cases has reached almost 3.6 million. The grim figures were compounded Monday by an internal government estimate in Washington that forecast the daily COVID-19 infection rate in the US could surge eight-fold to 200,000 per day by June 1, and the death toll could rise to 3,000.

A special telethon backed by the WHO but snubbed by Washington pulled in \$8.1 billion to support international efforts to develop a vaccine against the coronavirus. Leaders of major European powers, Japan, and Canada made the biggest pledges, along with philanthropists including Bill and Melinda Gates. "This was a powerful and inspiring demonstration of global solidarity," said WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. Seeming to defend its non-participation, the US State Department insisted the United States is "leading" the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and said it has spent more than \$1 billion together with US drug companies to work on a vaccine.

As the country struggles to contain its outbreak, the White House has stepped up an offensive against China, with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo saying there is "enormous evidence" the virus emerged in a lab in the Chinese city of Wuhan. That claim was rejected Monday by the WHO as well as

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Local

Kuwait contributes to global fight against coronavirus

Kuwait participates in EU's online Coronavirus Global Response pledging event

BRUSSELS: The State of Kuwait Monday pledged an amount of \$40 million in contribution to global efforts to fund research on a vaccine and other tools to combat the coronavirus. "I would like to announce that the State of Kuwait in its endeavors to support this conference and future international attempts to halt the spread of the coronavirus will pledge \$40 million," Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah told the online Coronavirus Global Response pledging event hosted by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. "Thus Kuwait's total donation to support global efforts in this battle amounts to a total of \$100 million," he noted.

"I thank the EU and all our co-hosts for organizing such an important event. Once again I would like to reiterate Kuwait's readiness to closely cooperate in the fight against this virus," he stressed. "It is my honor to represent His Highness Sheikh Sabah



KUWAIT: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah participates in an online Coronavirus Global Response pledging event hosted by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. — KUNA

Kuwait to take part in COVID-19 clinical trial

KUWAIT: Kuwait will participate in the World Health Organization (WHO) initiative, which will be held under the title 'Solidarity', said the Health Ministry Assistant Undersecretary for Drug and Food Control Affairs, Dr Abdullah Al-Bader. In a statement to the press yesterday, Dr Bader indicated that the initiative aims to compare four treatment options with the usual level of care to treat the coronavirus disease to assess its safety and effectiveness. Dr Bader pointed out that it also aimed to reach quick results on any drug that slows the development of the disease or improves the patient's condition in accordance with the guidelines determined by WHO in this regard.

The experimental treatments that will be studied according to the recommendations of WHO are Remdesivir, Lopinavir - Ritonavir and Lopinavir - Ritonavir in conjunction with interferon beta-1a and chloroquine or hydroxychloroquine, he added. He noted that these studies aim to obtain the largest number of data and results that contribute to determining safe and effective medicine under tight conditions, careful medical supervision and effective follow-up of all adverse effects that may result when using experimental drugs.

Dr Bader pointed out that this comes out of the role of the health ministry and its effective partnership with WHO and under the directions of the Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah and the instructions of the Undersecretary, Dr Mustafa Redha. The 'Solidarity' initiative is an international clinical trial in which more than 90 countries participate and aims to cooperate in reaching a safe and effective treatment for the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). — KUNA



Kuwait pledges \$40 million at EU event

Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Amir of the State of Kuwait, who wishes you the best in all endeavors, especially in combatting Coronavirus," he said.

Sheikh Ahmad Nasser said that since the outbreak of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), Kuwait has donated \$60 million to support the efforts of the WHO to respond to the Coronavirus threat in vulnerable countries. The WHO plays a decisive role in containing the spread of the virus and the State of Kuwait will continue to provide all kinds of support to this very important organization, he underlined. He expressed Kuwait's appreciations to von der Leyen, "for her great efforts in putting together this global conference to accelerate the development, production, and equitable access to the new COVID-19 diagnostic therapeutics and vaccines."



The Kuwaiti foreign minister said that the EU maintains an important role and a high level of status and global respect and stressed the importance of collective efforts in combatting the coronavirus pandemic. He urged the participants that despite the battle raging against the coronavirus, "we must not forget our efforts to support the people of the world. There are still the issues of refugees, migrants, poverty, famine, and the

spread of other diseases."

In the meantime, Von der Leyen in her introductory remarks said "the Gulf and the Middle East are strong partners in this endeavor." Observers in Brussels pointed out that Kuwait's pledge at today's global fundraising event is one of the biggest. Earlier, von der Leyen said the aim of the major event is to initially collect 7.5 billion euros (\$8 billion) for treatments and vaccines against the coronavirus.

Pandemic Diaries

Judge not



By Jamie Etheridge

etheridge@kuwaittimes.com

The riots at the amnesty shelters in Kuwait over the weekend triggered a firestorm of comments across social media. Some people supported the protestors and others were quick to condemn them. I was surprised at the quick judgments and harsh comments many people made.

Don't get me wrong, I do not condone violence or unrest in any form. But I also don't think it is fair or right for those not in that situation to judge the actions of those who are living through such a nightmare. There are now thousands of people, mostly daily wage laborers, stuck in amnesty camps here who have been waiting weeks to go home.

Yes, many of these workers came to Kuwait illegally. They paid thousands for visas but most did so in hopes of finding a job and earning a living. They are victims of human trafficking and circumstance and when they finally registered for an amnesty, they were corralled into camps and kept waiting without any clear timeline of when they would be allowed to return to their home countries.

Imagine the hopelessness, the despair of those sitting for days and weeks without any idea of when they can go home. Imagine the fear of being jobless with no hope of finding work anytime soon. Imagine being unable to feed your children or take care of your parents. Most likely don't even have money to buy phone credit or basic necessities. Starting from scratch or worse, returning home broke and in debt is a nightmare scenario and for thousands in Kuwait, that is now the reality they are facing.

I recently read on social media a very true analogy - we might all be facing the same storm but we are not all in the same boat. If we are lucky, we have a home to stay safe in, a family to bake for, an income (or at least some part of an income) and a future to look forward to. But that is not true for everyone. By some estimates at least 250,000 people in Kuwait lost their jobs in the first month of the lockdown and no doubt this number has increased significantly in the second month. Not to mention the thousands of small businesses facing bankruptcy and loss of livelihood.

Before we judge anyone else's response to the pandemic, it's important to remember that we are all facing different circumstances. Thankfully governments have announced that they will start the repatriation process and those stuck here can go home and hopefully start the process of rebuilding.

Coronavirus in Kuwait: What we know so far

KUWAIT: Kuwait has recorded 5,278 cases infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) as of Monday, in addition to 40 deaths. With the exception of 79 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, 2,032 people have recovered completely after previously being infected with the virus, while there are 3,206 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 (Hawally Educational Zone)
- 51576576 (Farwaniya Educational Zone)
- 51577055 (Jahra Educational Zone)
- 51577655 (Ahmadi Educational Zone)
- 51577951 (Mubarak Al-Kabeer Educational Zone)
- 51578171 (Religious Studies Department)
- 51588599 (Private Education Department)
- 51592515 (Services Department)
- 51594544 (Public Relations Department)

Medicine delivery

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

Civil ID number, hospital or clinic file number, mobile phone number and the medicine needed to the following numbers:

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

Meanwhile, all licensed pharmacies in Kuwait delivering medicine are allowed to continue their services 24 hours a day. The Ministry of Health is also asking doctors and nurses affiliated with the private medical sector to volunteer in order to contribute to the fight against the virus. Volunteering is available through the link: <http://volunteering.q8-health.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-Sahh: 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.

Local

Precautionary measures, social distancing pave way for restoring normal life in Kuwait

Kuwait enforces internationally concurred procedures against COVID-19

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti authorities are maintaining precautionary measures and internationally concurred procedures against the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pending restoration of normal life, a ranking official affirmed on Monday. Ministry of Health (MoH) officials briefed the ministers during a cabinet meeting about the local current status of the contagion, said Dr Buthaina Al-Mudhaf, the assistant undersecretary for public health affairs at the MoH. The executives were briefed about statistics and precautions that have been taken since the virus crept into the country, as well as enormous efforts that have been exerted to contain and control the pandemic, said Dr Mudhaf.

She was speaking at a joint news conference with the official government spokesperson Tareq Mizrem and the assistant professor for epidemics science at Kuwait University, Dr Mohammad Al-Khamees. Dr Mudhaf said she and her peers spoke, during the session, about methods employed to deal with local cases, challenges facing experts in bids to control the pandemic, tasks of epidemic tracing, regions' isolation, namely districts of Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and Al-Mahboula, with respect of number of the cases counted, in addition to future plans to isolate other, densely populated areas where a large number of cases have been found. She stressed on necessity of adhering to the precautionary measures, namely social distancing, as the means to pave way for restoring normal living in the country. Meanwhile, Professor Khamees said the health officials advised the ministers about employment of state-of-art mathematical and computing methods in tracking the infection cases geographically and on daily basis.

Community transmission

Conditions in Kuwait, in the beginning, were

under control however the pandemic later started spreading at community level, he said, describing how the pandemic status evolved at the local level. He revealed that these methods helped in discovering the pandemic spread at the community level. Moreover, they proved useful for taking decisions on partial and full isolation of some regions. Furthermore, these mathematical patterns shed light on how the virus spread from a single person to several others — meaning the community outbreak. They were also used to pinpoint infested locations, helping health decision makers to set priorities for opening or closing contaminated districts. Also in the beginning of the breakout, "We have had 30 major infested zones ... we have tackled nearly half of them ..." he said, disclosing that 15 regions still contained contamination cases.

Earlier, Mizrem said Minister of Health Dr Basel Al-Sabah, head of the team tasked with following up on the coronavirus status, informed the ministers

about latest developments at the international level. Dr Mudhaf and Dr Khamees gave a lengthy presentation during the session about the cases in the country from a perspective encompassing factors such as geography, age and nationality — in contrast to the pandemic status in other countries.

Citizens' installments

In the meantime, the cabinet assigned Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Housing Affairs Dr Rana Al-Fares to take necessary procedures for delaying payment of installments due for Kuwait Credit Bank. Indebted citizens to the Credit Bank, if they desire so, can delay paying due installments for six months as of date of issuing this decision, Mizrem said. There must be no "additions" to the installments



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah chairs a cabinet meeting via video conference. — KUNA

for the postponement, he added.

Mizrem was speaking after an extraordinary session of the cabinet, held at Seif Palace, under chairmanship of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. He added that the cabinet decided to assign Kuwait Petroleum Corporation and its subsidiary companies to prepare housing units for the medical and technical personnel serving at the field hospital at the fairground in Mishref, where people infected with coronavirus receive medical treatment. Moreover, the ministers approved a bill to postpone payment of due installments for clients of the defaulters and family support funds, tasking the minister of finance to work out mechanism of implementing the decision. — KUNA

News in brief

Co-op staff test positive

KUWAIT: Daiya Co-op Society announced that four employees were infected with novel coronavirus (COVID-19). The co-op will be closed until further notice. Also, a number of employees at Al-Shaab Co-op Society tested positive for coronavirus, and all branches were closed as a precaution, but the delivery option will be available to customers. Meanwhile, Al-Khaldiya Co-op Society announced closing until today after a security guard was suspected of contracting the virus. Furthermore, Al-Faiha Co-op Society announced that the branches in blocks 4,6,7, and 9 will be closed due to sterilization as a precautionary measure.

Egyptians' evacuation

CAIRO: Nader Saad, the Egyptian Cabinet's spokesman, announced that Egypt will operate 32 flights to Kuwait to evacuate the Egyptian residency violators today. In a phone statement to an Egyptian TV channel, Saad affirmed that two daily flights will be operated to evacuate 5,600 Egyptians who violated the residency law in Kuwait, starting with women, children, and the elderly.

Oil price down

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti oil went down by 22 cents to \$18.41 per barrel Monday, after it was at \$18.63 pb last Thursday, said the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) yesterday. Internationally, the price of the Brent crude went up by 76 cents to \$27.20 per barrel, the same case with the West Texas Intermediate, which went up by 61 cents to \$20.39 pb.

COVID-19 shuts down Education Ministry building

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Education has stopped work in all of its sectors after discovering a single novel coronavirus (COVID-19) infection case among the staff. Faisal Al-Maqseed, the assistant undersecretary and official spokesman of the ministry, said in a press statement on Monday that the stoppage covered all studios where long distance teaching lessons were recorded. Some sectors of the ministry have pursued work to tackle necessary issues, in the shadow of the coronavirus crisis, where the state imposed a general lockdown affecting the public sector and various fields in the country. The whole ministry building was sterilized after discovering the single case, he added, expressing gratitude to the civil defense and the ministry of defense for their rapid response to the ministry call for disinfecting the building. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Civil defense and defense ministry workers pose for a group photo after being called to sterilize the education ministry's building. — KUNA

Kuwait rejects riots at residency violators' center

KUWAIT: Kuwait government rebuffed the riots that took place at centers in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and Kabd housing expatriates who were in violation of the residency law, spokesman Tareq Al-Mizrem said Monday. "Expatriates in the two centers staged riots to press their demands for their country's authorities to be repatriated," Mizrem told a press conference following the cabinet meeting. The riots were not caused by mistreatment inside the centers nor a shortage in supplies, said Mizrem. "Security authorities were present and restored order inside the centers," he said. The government, added the spokesman, contacted authorities in the other countries to facilitate their citizens' repatriation. The Ministry of Interior prepared those special housing centers for more than

three weeks ago for the expatriates ahead of their deportation.

The Egyptian Embassy in Kuwait utterly rejected the "deplorable" happenings at centers for residency law breakers late Sunday, but appreciated the way Kuwaiti authorities addressed the matter. The embassy said in a press statement it trusts the wisdom of the Interior Ministry's personnel, underlining that such behaviors are totally unacceptable. It added that officials of the Egyptian Consulate in Kuwait had been sent to the centers yesterday to meet representatives of the Egyptians kept there, with Kuwaiti officials attending. It made it clear that it had urged those Egyptians to avert making any trouble, reassuring that evacuation flights would commence this week. — KUNA

Landlord cuts AC for nonpaying tenant

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: The coronavirus pandemic continues to ruin the lives of thousands of people. Sara, an expat employee working in the private sector, is one of many people seriously affected by the outbreak. She lives in a building where the landlord didn't waive the rent, and she has no income as she left her job three months ago.

Sara resigned in February to start a new job in a different company in March. Then the pandemic changed everything. "Now I stay without air-conditioning, as the landlord stopped it because I couldn't pay the rent. I couldn't pay as I didn't receive my indemnity from the old job, because I can't transfer my residency to the

new company. So basically the last salary that I received was in January," she told Kuwait Times.

"The landlord is not helping me although I explained the whole situation and told him that I will pay all the rent when I receive my indemnity. Now only renewals are possible, so I can't transfer my visa. I hope the situation will get back to normal soon," added Sara.

The landlord is not allowed to evict the tenant for not paying the rent in this situation as he can't issue an order from the court to vacate the flat, as the courts are not working now. But after the courts start working again, he can take legal action. This is why he chose to cut the AC as a way to force her to pay or leave. But such action is also illegal.

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed

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Local



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti nationals arrive at Kuwait International Airport Sunday after a repatriation plan for citizens stranded abroad was put together by the authorities during the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic crisis. Any incoming citizens will be required to undergo home quarantine for 28 consecutive days. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

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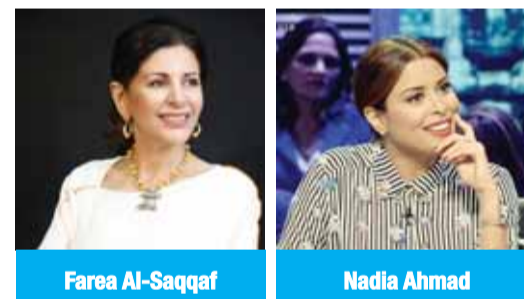
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‘Arab LOYAC’ helps youth cope with lockdown



KUWAIT: In a bid to help youth utilize the long periods they stay at home due to the COVID-19 crisis, LOYAC Foundation recently launched its new media program: ‘Arab LOYAC’ with participation of youth from Kuwait, Lebanon, Jordan and Yemen in a series of online programs made to match the current curfew period. The program is broadcast on Mondays on Instagram from 9:00 - 10:30 pm and is divided into two segments, the first to review the achievements of LOYAC branches in the Arab world and the second to exchange expertise amongst volunteers from those countries. The first episode talked about LOYAC in both Kuwait and Lebanon.

Speaking on the occasion, LOYAC’s chairperson Farea Al-Saqqaf said that the aim of the program is to highlight the achievements of LOYAC in Arab countries. “The Corona pandemic proved our vision to be worthwhile and that the unity of humanity destiny is real and not a romantic dream,” she said adding that according to LOYAC’s vision, the universe operates in an integrated system of components despite the change in shape. “Those components are eventually a form of independent life meant to ensure ecological balance. It is all of us not you and us that matters regardless of nationality,” she underlined noting that enlightened youth are needed everywhere to achieve peace and prosperity.

Further, Saqqaf said that the post-corona strategy focuses on intensifying cooperation and integration and combining efforts through a well-defined media plan. “Hence, I seize the opportunity to declare launching a new program between LAPA and LOYAC, which had been already executed in Lebanon under the name ‘MobiArt-Kuwait’ to provide art learning services for children of needy families in Kuwait as well as opportunities for youth to volunteer,” she said. Meanwhile, board member at LOYAC Lebanon Nadia Ahmad expressed her happiness with the program. She noted that Lebanon’s branch had recently celebrated its tenth anniversary marking ten years of endless efforts to help youth despite its limited resources. It provides them with opportunities to take part in various programs such HOMES, Vocational Training, Voluntary Programs, The Art Convoy for refugees and the post-school program for children aging 6-12, which were all achieved with the support of Kuwait’s LOYAC and the Kuwaiti people, she added.

In my view

When gauge goes red



We always spoke about being optimistic in the most difficult times regardless of what they might be. The latest was the appearance of the coronavirus, and all people are worried and afraid, and they are right to be so. Then we started to speak about what can be done, and how can we learn lessons from the entire situation, and see if we can actually find benefits in what happened.

I liked a story by Dr Ibrahim Elfiky, who died in Feb 2012. He was a well-known authority in field of human development. He said he was traveling towards the town of Ain Sokhna with his family, and it was after two in the morning. Just before moving he kept in mind to focus on the fuel gauge, because it was about to run out! He said that after buying a few things, he somehow forgot to refuel, and soon enough the fuel gauge light came on, which meant the fuel would run out soon.

He said I did not get worried to start with, because there are many gas stations ahead, or so I thought, but slowly as it got darker, I started to get worried, and I called a friend to ask him about the nearest fuel station, and he told me that it was very far away! Here the worrying turned to fear, and all what was on my mind took a back seat, and hopes were all about finding a fuel station. Then a light appeared in the distance, so hope started to return, only to discover it was not a fuel station, but a rest area - what frustration!

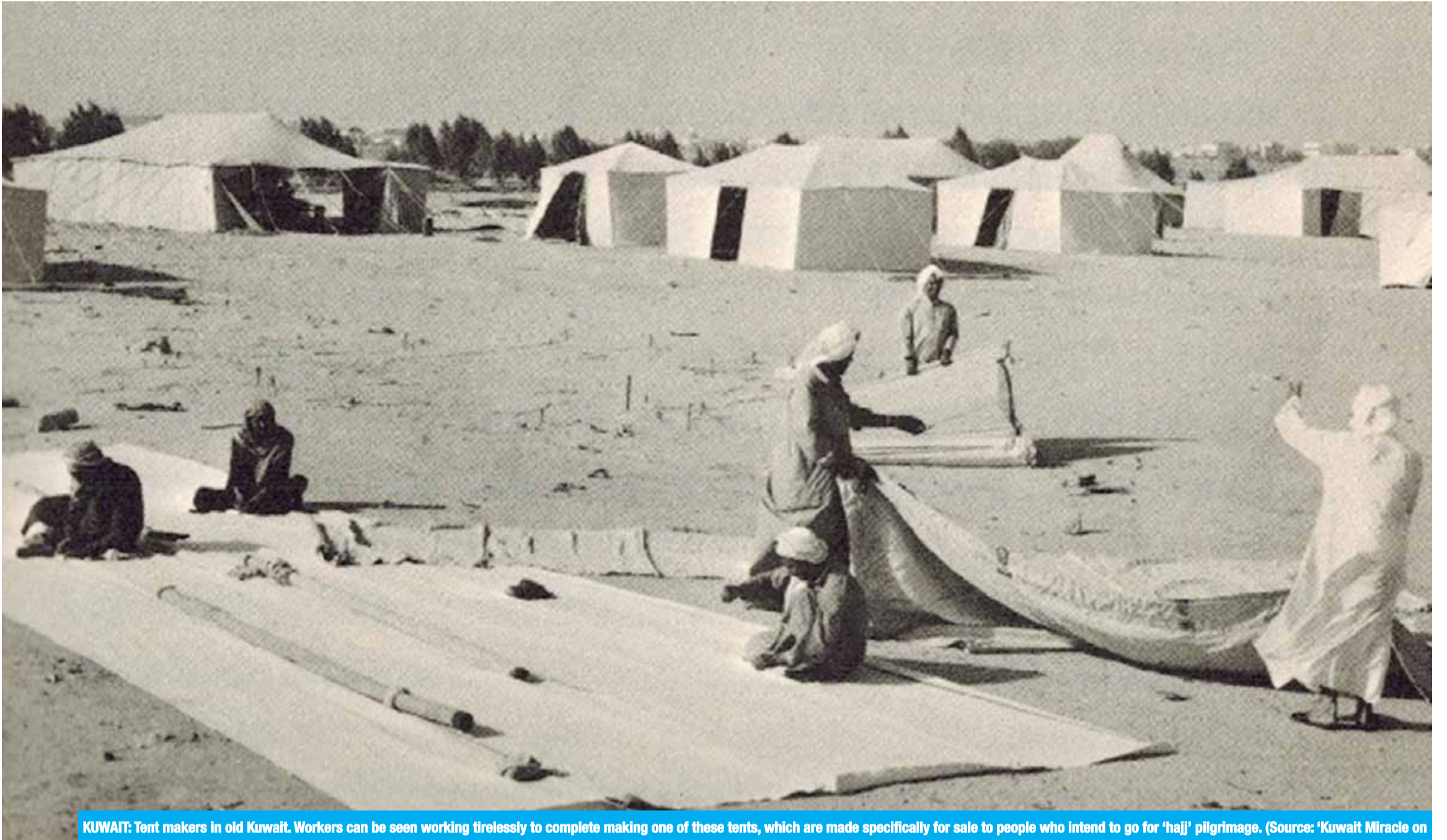
I asked the man about the nearest fuel station - he said it was 3 kilometers away. I resumed driving, and finally I saw the fuel station, yet when I arrived I did not find anyone, so I searched all over the place until finally a man appeared, and I asked him immediately ‘do you have gasoline?’ He said ‘yes’, the most beautiful word I heard in my life.

I thanked Allah, then resumed my trip with the feeling that a new life was given to me! At this point I remembered something that comes to me every Ramadan, because Ramadan is a “fuel station” from which we get our supply for the rest of year. How do we waste it? How do you risk dying of thirst? How do we pass by the only gas station and not fill up? And this Ramadan can be the last in the life of one of us - the last fuel station before leaving this world. The last station to repent, be in contact with family members, and return to the Holy Quran.

Almighty Allah says in surah Al-Dhariyat: “So flee to Allah. Indeed, I am to you from Him a clear warner.” (51:50). Yes, already one-third of the holy month of Ramadan has gone, and we still have two-thirds left, so use take the opportunity that may not come back! God bless you my friends.

Local

Kuwait Heritage



KUWAIT: Tent makers in old Kuwait. Workers can be seen working tirelessly to complete making one of these tents, which are made specifically for sale to people who intend to go for 'hajj' pilgrimage. (Source: 'Kuwait Miracle on the Desert' by David Cooke, New York, 1970. Prepared by: Mahmoud Aakaria Abu Alella, researcher in heritage, Ministry of Information)

Zain strategic partner of Give online donation platform

Company keen to enrich and encourage charitable work during Ramadan

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced its strategic partnership with Give, the only online platform exclusively dedicated to charities in Kuwait. The non-profit platform aims at facilitating donations and encouraging giving by connecting donors with registered and certified charities in Kuwait.

Zain's partnership with this non-profit platform comes in line with the company's corporate sustainability and social responsibility strategy that seeks to contribute to the welfare of the society in several ways under the company's comprehensive social campaign during the holy month of Ramadan. Zain prides itself on its long track of records and contributions it has put in philanthropic areas by collaborating with various non-profit organizations. The company strongly believes that such initiatives help infuse a sense of responsibility into members of the society, to help support those who are in need of help.

Give, the only online platform exclusively dedicated to charities in Kuwait, mainly aims at facilitating donations and encouraging giving by connecting donors with registered and certified charities in Kuwait. The platform helps donors look for charity projects and opportunities in one place, as well as process their donations safely via



Charity Association for Development, Al Sidra Association for Psychological Care of Cancer Patients, Al-Najat Charity, and Rahma International.

Give includes many features that can benefit donors, including ease of access to charities and their projects through the website or smartphone app, using filters to look for certain projects, comparing projects between different charities, reading full details about each project to make an informed decision, view donation history and receive notifications about project updates or reports, and more.

Zain has always been keen to launch charitable initiatives during Ramadan to support the various members of the Kuwaiti society, and the company is keen on reflecting Islamic and humanitarian values and principles to enrich giving and increase bonding between individuals. Zain's corporate sustainability and social responsibility campaign during the holy month of Ramadan includes an array of humanitarian and cultural programs, with the aim of celebrating the true spirit the holy month brings and helping less fortunate people enjoy Ramadan happily.

(COVID-19) crisis. The EPA chairman has added that concern for environmental cleanliness is a humanitarian duty stressing that such a responsibility must be shouldered by all citizens and residents.

Works done electronically

Meanwhile, Kuwait Municipality Director General Ahmad Al-Manfouhi declared on Monday readiness to make 90 percent of transactions electronically once regular work resumes following stoppage resulting from the coronavirus crisis. Manfouhi said in a statement that some transactions, namely issuance of construction permits and restoration of electricity, continued during the current crisis via the advanced electronic system. He has indicated that some work cannot be done electronically because they are linked to other departments. The municipality has recently issued 192 construction permits and restored power to several districts. — KUNA

Slice of Ramadan dipped in Bowl of Mercy

By Mariam-Joyce DSouza

By way of introduction, the 30 days of this beautiful, glorious and bountiful month called 'Ramadan' are divided into three parts - each comprising of 10 days. The first 10 days are the days of Mercy; the middle 10 days are the days of Forgiveness; and the last 10 days are the days of Salvation. This article refers to the first 10 days of mercy.

My dear readers, it's the most wonderful time of the year and a great opportunity to make and establish resolutions. This is a special month because it symbolizes the spirit of worship, sacrifice and most challenging of all - God consciousness. All leading to becoming merciful ourselves thus resulting in receiving God's blessings of mercy. Hence, I take this opportunity to urge you to seek opportunities to be merciful. Show leniency, clemency and compassion. Be graceful, tender-hearted, generous and kind. Practice pity, charity and forgiveness. Exercise humanity, humaneness, forbearance, soft-heartedness and tolerance. Maintain mildness of character, sympathy, empathy and benevolence. So in these ten days (and hopefully always), attach your name to at least one of these traits.

This is a special quote for those readers who house the volumes of hadiths on their bookshelf: Allah created mercy in one hundred parts and sent down to earth only one part. Because of this one part, there is mutual love amongst creation, so much so that an animal will lift up its hoof from its young one, fearing that it might harm it. Allah has reserved the remaining ninety-nine parts of this mercy to favor His believing servants on the Day of Judgment. (The Prophet Muhammad as recorded in Bukhari and Muslim, Book #037, Hadith #6631)

I would like to share this little story I recently read. And so as most stories begin, once upon a time, in a small rural village, there lived a young orphan boy with his paternal relatives. Due to the scarcity of water in the village, the young boy awoke early every morning, carried his pot and headed for the stream with the aim of fetching water for the family. Sadly for him, he alone had this task as a routine every morning and evening while his cousins were given other lenient tasks. Yet, the young boy bore no grudge against his family. He continued to love them and carried out his task, diligently. However, on his way back from the stream, with a pot filled to the brim with water, he usually encountered some individuals who invariably were thirsty. Despite knowing that his aunt would berate him (often get a beating too) for fetching half-

filled pots, this boy would stop and offer water to these individuals. One day, he couldn't bear the scolding from his aunt, so he swore never to give anyone water. But on one particular day on his way back, he met a strange looking man who begged him for water. The strange man lay by the road side with an injury. The young boy remembered his vow - never to give anyone water - but contemplated for a moment. His heart filled with mercy for the stranger and so he gave the man some water. When he got home, his aunt noticed the half-filled pot, and again pounced on him - this time with even more cruelty than ever before. As she was beating this young lad, there was a knock on the door. It was the strange wounded man - a mailman who would have died of thirst on the way if not for the boy's mercy. Apparently, he came from town with an envelope for this very same young boy. It contained a scholarship with an additional gift of cash for the boy! You can only imagine the boy's feelings of profound joy, deep happiness and intense gratitude which was reflected in his profession. The boy grew up to be a famous orator and he always opened his lectures talking about his childhood experience because he realized that it was God who had put him in the "mailman's way" and it was God who had placed mercy in his heart for others.

With mercy comes a heart filled with compassion and love for the giver and the beneficiary. It is rightly said that where there is mercy, there is life. Your everyday good deeds, however small, are never in vain for they shall return to you when least expected.

Some questions as food for thought - will I become less of a person if I smile at and pray for the less fortunate, the needy and those whose paychecks are not as heavy as mine? Will I be termed a weak person if I forgive those who have hurt me - be it strangers or loved ones? Will I lose my wealth if I practice some charity and give alms? Will I lose my health if I practice forbearance and tolerance with everyone around me - at home and at work? Practice does make perfect! Make it your resolution to subscribe to just one of these adjectives and you will reap benefits galore.

My experience has taught me that mercy begins by opening oneself to those with whom one might strongly disagree. Mercy doesn't end there, of course. It may begin with small acts of understanding, but can lead to life-changing experiences of love, peace and tolerance.

And this ode is for those sisters and brothers who have Shakespeare on their bookshelf:

The quality of mercy is not strain'd.
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest:
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.
Shakespeare's 'The Merchant of Venice'

-Courtesy of the TIES Center: the TIES Center aims at empower Kuwait's expats through social and educational services that promote a positive and productive role in society, and to facilitate opportunities for intra- and interfaith interactions that promote social solidarity. For more information, please call 25231015/6 or e-mail: info@tiescenter.net.



Connecting donors in Kuwait

a secure payment gateway.

All the charities listed in the Give platform are certified and licensed by the official authorities in Kuwait, and they currently feature 108 various charitable projects. The current list includes: the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS), Direct Aid, Sheikh Abdullah Al-Nouri Charity Society, International Islamic Charity Organization, Kuwait Society for Relief, Kuwait Humanitarian and Friendship Society, Rohamaa Baynahum Charity, Global

EPA distributes bins for safe disposal of masks, gloves

KUWAIT: Chairman of the Environment Public Authority (EPA) Sheikh Abdullah Ahmad Al-Humoud Al-Sabah said on Monday special containers will be set up at co-operatives societies (commercial stores) for safe disposal of medical masks and gloves. Sheikh Abdullah said in a statement that EPA had prepared and assembled such bins for distribution to the stores to ensure that the masks and gloves are dumped in a hygienic way. Many citizens and workers in Kuwait have been wearing the protecting masks and gloves, amid the novel coronavirus



Italy baffled by unexplained surge in coronavirus deaths

New York Times leads the way at 2020 Pulitzers

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ILLINOIS: Mourners bury the remains of Ghulam Farid at Bluff City Cemetery following a funeral service at Masjid Al Huda (also known as the Midwest Islamic Center) in Elgin, Illinois. — AFP

US milestone of 100,000 deaths likely

'Epicenters of today may not be the epicenters of tomorrow'

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump now says his worst-case coronavirus scenario would be 100,000 deaths, but the country will probably reach that grim milestone by next month, according to several scientific models—none of which predict a summertime halt to the virus's spread. "We're going to lose anywhere from 75,000, 80,000 to 100,000 people. That's a horrible thing," Trump said Sunday evening at a virtual town hall meeting on Fox News.

The Republican incumbent, who is vying for reelection in November, argued that without lockdown measures that have crippled the world's biggest economy, the toll would have been far greater—more than 1.2 million "at a minimum." But Trump's end-game figure is likely far lower than the reality—the country has already seen 68,000 confirmed deaths, with about 30,000 new cases per day throughout April, and several states have started reopening before having brought the virus under control. Trump's own White House says 100,000 to 240,000 Americans will die from COVID-19.

According to an internal report by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), cited by The New York Times, new cases are expected to surge from mid-May, hitting 200,000 per day by June 1, with the daily death toll almost doubling to 3,000. Even if lifting lockdown measures did not

cause case numbers to spike, the nature of the epidemic is such that more bleak figures are inevitable. "My personal best guess is that we are going to reach 100,000 deaths around the beginning of June," Nicholas Reich, an associate professor of biostatistics at the University of Massachusetts said.



Lockdown cripples the world's biggest economy

Reich's lab has looked at several major models to come up with an average trajectory for the epidemic's development—that curve indicates the United States can expect to hit 90,000 deaths by May 23. And yet, many Americans appear to have already decided they have had enough of living under lockdown—according to anonymous data provided by phone apps and other platforms and analyzed by the Institute for

Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) at the University of Washington.

"There have been many, many states where mobility is starting to go up, even before the social distancing mandates are coming off," said the institute's director Christopher Murray. "This rise in mobility, the last week or 10 days, is likely leading to some increased transmissions." The IHME—whose initial projections for the pandemic were criticized as too optimistic—has heavily revised its forecast: from 72,000, it now predicts 134,000 people will die of COVID-19 by August 4. It expects the 100,000 mark to be reached by May 21.

Big country

Of nine models cited on May 1 by the CDC, at least three of them predicted that 100,000 fatalities would be recorded in four weeks' time, including two put together by Columbia University in New York. One from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology bets on 113,000 deaths by June 1. Few current models go beyond a four-week window, given the uncertainty of the situation. And of course, all of these forecasts come with the usual margin of error—sometimes totaling tens of thousands of deaths. Epidemiologists consistently caution that no model should be taken on its own, as each is based on different hypotheses.

The most difficult element to factor in is how people will behave over the coming months. Will they wear masks in public? How many will keep working from home? How many "non-essential" trips will people make to stores or restaurants? When will the country return to pre-pandemic standards of going out, or will it ever? "We're at an inflection point right now, where some states are opening up, and some aren't," Reich said. "There's an added layer of uncertainty."

In the United States, initial hotspots like New York and New Jersey have been replaced by new ones. In Texas, Illinois and the US capital, the number of new cases is growing. In California and Florida, it is starting to level off. "The epicenters of today may not be the epicenters of tomorrow," said David Rubin, a physician at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia who also teaches at the University of Pennsylvania.

His team identified heat as a moderating factor that could help keep the death toll down, but he warned: "Temperature alone is not going to save you," including in places like Texas where stores have reopened. IHME researchers found a similar correlation: for every degree Celsius increase, they observed about a two percent drop in transmission, according to Murray—although he cautioned that social distancing remained far more effective than sunshine in curbing transmissions. — AFP

Relief in Lagos; lockdown ends

LAGOS: Africa's biggest city, Lagos, got back to work on Monday at the end of a five-week coronavirus lockdown. In the metropolis of 20 million, where exuberance and poverty live side by side, relief at being able to earn money once again was almost palpable, despite Nigeria's mounting COVID-19 toll. All shops seemed to be open, car parks were full and hawkers selling cool drinks, grilled meat and vegetables were pitching their wares on street corners as before, AFP reporters said.

Adewale Oluwa reopened his fruit and vegetable stall, carefully setting out a fine array of tomatoes. By 10 am, his customers were out in force and laughter was in the air as old acquaintances spotted each other. "We were so impatient" for the confinement to end, Oluwa said. "Today is wonderful." Minibus stations were as busy as before the lockdown, although touts wore masks as they called out to passengers. Nigeria follows South Africa, the continent's other economic giant, which returned to work on Friday. Rwanda, a fast-expanding economy in East Africa, partially ended a strict six-week-long lockdown on Monday.

'Month of hunger'

Many people said they were glad to be back earning money—upwards of 83 million of Nigeria's nearly 200 million population live on the equivalent of less than \$1 per day, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said in a report on Monday. For those without savings or working in the informal sector, the lockdown was a cruel blow. "It was really a big loss," Oluwa said. "You know, we sell perishable (food), so we need to open



LAGOS: Motorists queue in a traffic gridlock as commercial activities return at the end of a five-week COVID-19 coronavirus lockdown in Lagos. — AFP

every day. So to lock down for weeks was (a) big issue for us."

Bus driver Ganiyu Ayinla said: "It's been over one month of hunger and suffering. I can now make money to take care of my family," he said, smiling as he braked at a busy stop to pick up passengers. From the Ajegunle Tollgate, an area bordering Ogun State, a long queue of passengers waited to board.

Security agents and transport union officials were on hand to ensure drivers complied with directives requiring social distance, face masks, hand washing and use of hand sanitizers before boarding. "We will only allow passengers with a nose mask to enter. And only drivers that make provision for water, soap and hand sanitizers for their passengers can operate. Buses are also required to carry not more than 60 percent of their capacity," a police officer who gave his name as George, told AFP.

He said his team had prevented some 50

buses flouting the order on Monday morning. Huge numbers of people rushed to the reopened banks to get money—many did not have an ATM card to withdraw from a cash machine. "Look at this mess, there's no social distancing," said a driver, Anderson Kiagbodo, observing hundreds of people milling outside a branch of GT Bank, with security guards standing impotently nearby. "Don't be surprised if the spread of the virus explodes after this."

The stay-at-home order applied to Lagos, neighboring Ogun state and the Nigerian national capital Abuja. But in the face of mounting social distress and discontent, President Muhammadu Buhari last week ordered a "phased and gradual easing," replacing the lockdown with an overnight curfew. The relaxation has triggered deep concern in some quarters, given how easily the coronavirus spread and the poor state of Nigeria's health system. — AFP

Doctor fears second wave

WASHINGTON: The doctor who treated the first COVID-19 patient in the United States said Monday he fears a second outbreak of the disease when lockdown measures are lifted. George Diaz's first patient, diagnosed in January in Washington state, has already recovered after receiving remdesivir, an experimental drug that the US approved on Friday for emergency use.

While he feels encouraged by this anti-viral, Diaz emphasized that isolation to avoid contagion remains the "most effective" treatment for COVID-19 right now. Since that first case in January, the US has overtaken all other countries to have by far the highest caseload - about 1.2 million - as well as the most deaths, around 69,000. Despite forecasts of a worsening death toll, some states are already reopening to try to ease the economic strain of shelter-in-place orders that have put more than 30 million Americans out of work in six weeks.

"What worries me is that when the economy starts to reopen, we are going to see a second outbreak that is perhaps as big as the first, and the first one was very difficult for us and for the whole world," Diaz told reporters during a video meeting organized by the State Department. "And more than anything, I am concerned that I don't know if we are going to have the resources to handle a second outbreak," he added.

Remdesivir, made by Gilead Sciences, was shown in a major clinical trial to shorten the time to recovery in some coronavirus patients. Diaz said that, pending development of a vaccine, remdesivir appears to act against the virus, but he cautioned that the drug must be used very wisely. It should not be a crutch for people to say, "I can now do whatever I want because we have a treatment." No," Diaz warned. They must continue to follow guidance on social distancing, he said. — AFP



NEW YORK: Healthcare workers wave as a parade of classic cars makes its way by Nassau University Medical Center in a salute to workers on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic. — AFP

International

Assad warns of 'catastrophe' as Syria virus lockdown eases

Syria air defenses intercept Israeli missiles

DAMASCUS: President Bashar Al-Assad has warned of a "catastrophe" in war-battered Syria if the easing of lockdown measures against coronavirus is mishandled. The government in Damascus has officially recorded 44 cases of COVID-19, including three deaths, while Kurdish authorities in the country's northeast have announced three cases in areas under their control.

The relatively low number of recorded cases does not mean Syria is "out of the danger zone", Assad told the government's coronavirus crisis body. "Although the numbers are limited, this doesn't mean they can't explode suddenly in a matter of days or maybe weeks," he said in a video shared on the presidency's social media channels.

"This will put us in the face of a real catastrophe that would overwhelm the state's health and logistical capabilities." The government last week started to gradually lift a weeks-old lockdown that has hampered a crumbling economy battered by Western sanctions and nine years of war. A night-time curfew is still in force and residents are not allowed to travel across provinces, but markets have reopened during the day and the government on Monday said that Friday prayers will resume on May 8.

Assad said Syria was in a "transitional phase" from the lockdown but warned of grave economic challenges ahead. Syria is in the thick of a grinding economic crisis that has seen its pound hit record lows against the dollar, while inflation has soared, plunging most of the population into poverty. "In tandem with the health challenge, the other challenge during the coronavirus pandemic and even before is the economic challenge," Assad said.

With the pandemic, "citizens from different segments of society have been forced to choose between hunger and poverty... or illness." Later on Monday, a plane landed at the Damascus airport in the evening bringing in 251 Syrian passengers from the United Arab Emirates, the official SANA news agency said. It is part of the Syrian government's efforts to repatriate nationals stranded abroad. The returnees will be quarantined for 14 days upon arrival, SANA added.

Missiles intercepted

In another development, Israeli missiles targeting a research facility in northern Syria were intercepted on Monday, Syrian state media said, while a war monitor reported a second attack minutes later in the east. Israel has launched hundreds of strikes in Syria since the start of the war in 2011, targeting government troops, allied Iranian forces and Hezbollah fighters. "Syrian air defenses intercept an Israeli aggression on a research centre in Aleppo province," the official SANA news agency said. Citing a military source, SANA later said the intercepted missiles targeted several "military depots" in the Al-Safira area southeast of Aleppo city.

The Israeli army did not comment on the reports. The raids caused "violent explosions" in the area, according to the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a war monitor that relies on a network of sources inside Syria. The Observatory said strikes targeted weapons depots belonging to pro-Iran militias and Syrian government forces. There were no immediate reports of casualties. Minutes later, warplanes hit positions of pro-Iran



ARIHA: Photo taken during the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadan shows an aerial view of members of the displaced Syrian family of Tariq Abu Ziad breaking their fast together for the sunset 'iftar' meal, in the midst of the rubble of their destroyed home upon their return to the town after fleeing during the previous military assault on the town by Syrian government forces and their allies. — AFP

militias in the Mayadeen desert in eastern Syria, according to the Observatory. It was not immediately clear who was responsible but the Observatory said it was "likely" to be Israel. If confirmed, the strikes would mark the fifth Israeli attack on Syria in two weeks. Israel rarely confirms details

of its operations in Syria but says Iran's presence in support of President Bashar Al-Assad is a threat and that it will continue its strikes. On Friday, Israeli forces hit a Hezbollah missile depot in central Syria hours after Israeli helicopters fired missiles at sites in southern Syria. — AFP

News in brief

US approves Sudan envoy

KHARTOUM: Sudan announced Monday that the United States had approved Khartoum's pick of a veteran diplomat as ambassador to Washington, the first such envoy in over two decades. Ties between Khartoum and Washington had been strained during the three-decade dictatorship of Omar Al-Bashir, but eased after he was ousted by the army last year following mass protests. Sudan's Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok visited Washington in December and the two countries agreed to exchange envoys. In a statement, Sudan's foreign ministry said Monday "the US government approved the nomination of Nour Eddin Satti as an ambassador and plenipotentiary of the Republic of Sudan." A veteran diplomat, Satti served as Sudan's ambassador to France in the 1990s and later worked with United Nations peacekeeping missions in Congo and Rwanda. — AFP

Hezbollah condemns ban

BEIRUT: The head of Lebanon's Hezbollah movement has condemned Germany's ban on his group as bowing to US pressure and insisted it was not active in the country. Germany designated Hezbollah a "Shiite terrorist organization" on Thursday as its security forces raided mosques and associations linked to the group. In a televised speech, Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah called it a "political decision that reflects Germany's submission to America's will and to pleasing Israel". "When we say we are not active in Germany, we are being 100 percent honest," said the leader of the Iranian-backed group. Hezbollah was established in 1982 during the Lebanese civil war and fought a devastating 2006 war with Israel. The United States and Israel have long designated it a terrorist group and urged allies to follow suit. — AFP

Seychelles out of confinement

VICTORIA: Life in the Seychelles began returning to normal on Monday as authorities relaxed confinement measures, with no new coronavirus cases recorded in almost a month and only 11 people infected in the island nation. The archipelago went into lockdown on April 8, two days after the last case of the virus was recorded, shutting non-essential services and banning all movement aside from grocery shopping. A few days later a nighttime curfew was added to the measures. The restrictions were applied to Mahe, the main island as well as the second and third most-populated islands Praslin and La Digue. On Monday most businesses were allowed to re-open and people were once again moving freely and going to work-few of whom wore a mask. — AFP

Venezuela arrests 2 Americans

CARACAS: Two Americans were detained in Venezuela on Monday on suspicion of plotting to topple President Nicolas Maduro's government, which has accused US-backed opposition leader Juan Guaido of bankrolling the scheme. The arrests came a day after the government said it foiled an "invasion" from the sea, killing eight assailants and capturing two others. Maduro appeared on state television to show the passports of Luke Denman, 34, and Airan Berry, 41, and told the Venezuelan military high command that the pair were members of the US security forces. Attorney General Tarek William Saab earlier told reporters that "hired mercenaries" had signed a \$212 million dollar contract with Guaido using funds "stolen" from state oil company PDVSA. — AFP

Outraging Beijing, Pompeo pushes US hard line over virus

WASHINGTON: Branded "insane" by Chinese state media but hailed by US conservatives, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is taking the lead in pressing a hard line against Beijing over the coronavirus pandemic. Pompeo has been at the forefront of bringing into the mainstream a theory that the illness that has killed nearly 250,000 worldwide slipped out of a virology laboratory in the Chinese city of Wuhan, where the virus first emerged last year.

The hawkish role is familiar for Pompeo, who has also advocated sweeping pressure on Iran including a January drone strike that killed one of its top generals. The former Army infantryman has for months been describing China as a major adversary on everything from technology to defense-a contrast with President Donald Trump, who has abruptly



NEW YORK: Workers in protective suits get ready while waiting for people to be tested for COVID-19. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said 'enormous evidence' showed the new coronavirus originated in a lab in China, further fuelling tensions with Beijing over its handling of the outbreak. — AFP

swung from assailing to praising Beijing.

Yet Pompeo has also managed a rare feat in Trump's Washington-staying in the good graces of the mercurial president, who is not known to have uttered a critical word against his top aide.

Call centers expose fault line in Japan's pandemic fight

TOKYO: Almost a month after Tokyo declared a state of emergency, dozens of call centre employees for telecom KDDI Corp still commute into their crowded office, where the fear of coronavirus infection has taken a back seat to data security. Call centers have exposed one of the fault lines in Japan's fight against the pandemic, as it takes a less forceful approach than many countries. In the past few weeks, 17 infections were confirmed at a post office call centre in the northern island of Hokkaido and 11 at a Kyoto mail-order business.

Japan Inc has been reluctant to embrace telecommuting, with firms citing concerns about data security. Companies also fear a decline in worker productivity and customer service. "Dozens of us are still working in a crowded office," a worker at KDDI Evolva, KDDI's call centre business, told Reuters. "We could be hit with mass infection any time."

Until recently, the KDDI Evolva office in Tokyo was packed at peak hours with nearly 80 operators sitting less than a meter apart without partitions, said the worker, who spoke on condition of anonymity. Staff numbers have now been thinned, but not enough to dispel infection concerns, the worker said. Another Evolva worker said operators were flooded with non-urgent enquiries because more people were now at home, adding: "Are these inquiries worth the infection risk for us?"

KDDI Evolva said it was taking measures to protect workers, including reducing the number of operators and installing partitions. A KDDI spokeswoman said call centers were part of social infrastructure and need to remain open. She said it was considering requests from KDDI Evolva. Reuters spoke to a total of eight call centre operators at multiple companies. All of them described fears about working conditions.

'No choice'

Japan has some 250,000 call centre operators, many of them contractors with less job security than permanent employees. General Support Union, a labor union, has received more than 100 calls from operators worried about safety in the last month, representative Kotaro Aoki said. Some who opted to take leave were told it would hurt their careers, he said. "Most of us have no choice but continue to work to keep the jobs," one contractor at a call centre for photocopier maker Fuji Xerox Co said.

A Fuji Xerox spokesman said it made no distinc-



TOKYO: A woman wearing a facemask amid concerns over the spread of the COVID-19 walks past a man laying on the street in Tokyo. — AFP

tion between contractors and regular employees in allowing telecommuting. He said it was expanding telecommuting, but some workers need to be in the office and in front of physical photocopiers and printers to troubleshoot for customers. One Tokyo contract worker, who didn't want her company identified, said staff were told they couldn't reduce operations because customers would complain.

Japan declared a state of emergency in Tokyo and six other areas on April 7 that has since been extended nationwide until the end of May. Under Japan's post World War Two constitution, the government can't order companies to close, but it has tried to limit infections while keeping the economy ticking over. It has targeted a 70%-80% reduction in person-to-person contact, but as of April 26, Google mobility data showed traffic to workplaces was just 27% lower than before the pandemic. Japan has reported nearly 16,000 infections and some 569 deaths.

Call centres have been resistant to telecommuting. A survey last year found only 6.3% of call centers allowed staff to work from home. Nearly 80% said they had no plans to introduce telecommuting, with most citing fears of data leaks. Top wireless carrier NTT DoCoMo saw 10 confirmed infections at one centre in March. "Call operators need to be physically there to take calls from customers," a company spokesman said. By contrast, the Japanese unit of Switzerland's Zurich Insurance Group switched 95% of its 500 operators to telecommuting by using virtual desktops that prevent information from being stored locally. Telecoms companies such as KDDI and NTT DoCoMo have felt pressure to keep centers open after the communications ministry requested they scale back in-person operations, an industry source said. — AFP

Washington watchers see loyalty to Trump as the ultimate principle of Pompeo, whose own political future is tied to sticking by Trump and helping him win re-election in November.

A former congressman, Pompeo has been unabashedly partisan as compared with past US top diplomats, recently criticizing Trump's presumptive Democratic presidential rival Joe Biden by name at a State Department news conference. Douglas Paal, a senior Asia adviser under previous Republican presidents, said that Pompeo's focus on China's role in the pandemic was in line with Trump's re-election strategy.

"The economy has cratered, the stock market has cratered, so what else do you run on in the election? Well, run against China," said Paal, a scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He said that Pompeo, who has only made two brief visits to Beijing since taking office two years ago, takes a more ideological approach to China than previous secretaries of state. "Every time, it's never the 'Chinese government.' It's always the 'Chinese Communist Party.' That terminology seems to explain to me everything about what China is doing," he said. — AFP

Peru's Fujimori freed from jail

LIMA: Peru's opposition leader Keiko Fujimori was released on Monday from pre-trial detention on corruption charges after just three months, an AFP reporter witnessed. Fujimori left the woman's prison in the capital Lima on bail wearing a face mask and white gloves. She had earlier announced on Twitter that she would head straight from the facility to take a coronavirus test. The 44-year-old's release came four days after a court granted her bail of 70,000 soles (\$20,000).

Fujimori, a mother of two, had asked to be released due to fears she might contract the novel coronavirus in the Chorrillos women's jail, but the court granted her release based on a separate appeal. At her home later, a worker from a private laboratory carried out the COVID-19 tests. In a video posted to Facebook, Fujimori said that beyond the joy she felt at returning home, she wanted to tell authorities that the situation in Peruvian prisons is "untenable". "I beg them to alleviate the terrible overcrowding that, in the midst of the pandemic, is a death penalty," she said.

Odebrecht scandal

She was jailed in January just two months after being released from a previous 13-month pre-trial detention. Once Peru's most popular politician, Fujimori is accused of accepting \$1.2 million in illicit party funding from Brazilian construction giant Odebrecht for her unsuccessful 2011 presidential election campaign. "Keiko will continue to face this investigation. She's the one who most wants this to be clarified," her lawyer Guillian Loza said at the weekend.

Attorney General Rafael Vela, who is co-ordinating the team investigating the Odebrecht scandal, said on Saturday he would appeal the release. Odebrecht is embroiled in a wide-ranging corruption scandal and has admitted to paying hundreds of millions of dollars in bribes to win contracts in 12 countries. At least \$29 million was paid to Peruvian officials from 2004, including to bribe four former presidents, the company has said. Alejandro Toledo, Ollanta Humala, Pedro Pablo Kuczynski and the late Alan Garcia have been implicated in the scandal.

She has been barred from living in the same house as her American husband Mark Villanella as he is under investigation in the same case. Villanella announced on social media that he and the couple's two daughters were staying with Fujimori's mother, Susana Higuchi. "We've decided that until we have the test results, I won't be able to join my daughters," Fujimori had said on Twitter. — AFP

International

Italy baffled by unexplained surge in coronavirus deaths

Death toll could be far higher than the 29,000 reported

ROME: Italy recorded almost 50 percent more fatalities in March than usual, according to new official data showing that the real coronavirus death toll could be far higher than the 29,000 reported. The new data suggest that the death toll from the day the country's first infection was reported on February 20 to March 31 could be nearly double the official figure. The Italian government has struggled to determine how many people have actually died from an illness that forced the nation of 60 million to shut down over the first half of March.

The data were released on the day Italy eased nine weeks of confinement. Italians were allowed to stroll freely in parks and visit their relatives even while many small stay shut for another two weeks. Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte hopes a drop in infections and a gradual return to business can help the economy start recovering from what might be its worst downturn since the 1930s. But Conte's government still does not know how many people have died of COVID-19 - a grim reality that makes planning for the months ahead even harder.

Italy's civil protection services had attributed 12,428 fatalities to the virus by the end of March. But the state statistics agency ISTAT and the ISS public health institute said nearly 11,700 extra deaths needed to be accounted for in that span. The number was derived by comparing Italy's total num-

ber of deaths between February 20 to March 31 to the statistical average for that period in the preceding five years.

"For the month of March, the national average shows an increase in deaths from all causes of 49.4 percent," ISTAT and the ISS said in a joint statement. The statement referred to the nearly 11,700 unaccounted for fatalities as "excess deaths". It said deaths among men in their 70s rose by a factor of 2.3 nationally - and among men in their 80s by 2.2 times - in that span. These were "the most significant excess deaths", the two state organizations said.

Government still doesn't know the actual death toll



Three causes

Italy became the global epicenter of the pandemic after its toll from the illness surpassed the official one reported by China on March 19. The Mediterranean country recorded more than a third of all coronavirus deaths registered across the world that month. Yet local officials at the centre of the outbreak in northern provinces around Milan viewed Italy's official figures with suspicion. Some were reporting fatality rates in March that exceeded usual figures by a factor of five or six.

Those deaths did not appear to be registering in the official figures being released daily by Italy's



ROME: A homeless woman sleeps on the pavement outside the Termini railway in Rome, as Italy starts to ease its lockdown, during the country's lockdown aimed at curbing the spread of the COVID-19 infection, caused by the novel coronavirus. — AFP

civil protection service. Italy's official death toll rose by 195 on Monday to 29,079 - second only to the United States. But the figure is almost entirely comprised of hospital deaths.

Few of the elderly in care homes have been tested and the number of deaths from the virus in the community is unknown. ISTAT and the ISS

said in a joint statement that there were three possible explanations for the 11,700 additional fatalities. One is that these people were never tested for the virus but actually had it when they died. There could also be "an indirect effect of the virus" in which COVID-19 exacerbates an existing condition such as kidney or other organ dysfunction. — AFP

US senators, many in masks, return under new virus guidance

WASHINGTON: The US Senate convened for its first regular session in five weeks Monday in the heat of the coronavirus pandemic that has killed 68,000 Americans and left tens of millions jobless. Lawmakers, who under new guidelines are encouraged but not required to wear face masks, are expected to address disputes over how to confront the outbreak and mitigate the devastating economic impacts.

The Senate—with 49 of its 100 members age 65 or older and therefore considered at higher risk—gave in for its first full session since March 25. "Now the time has come for us to continue conducting our nation's business in ways that are only possible with senators here in the capital," Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said. "The Senate's going to be as smart and safe as we possibly can, and we are going to show up for work like the essential workers that we are."

Republican McConnell did not wear a mask inside the chamber, but many lawmakers from both parties did. In hallways outside the chamber, nearly all senators, including McConnell, were wearing masks. Top Senate Democrat Chuck Schumer said members should prepare for "one of the strangest sessions of the US Senate in modern history"—one where lawmakers do not shake hands or huddle with colleagues. Democrat Dianne Feinstein, at 86 the oldest current US senator, said that while she did not feel it was appropriate yet for the Senate to hold full sessions, she was unphased about returning to work.

"I'm not worried about it. It's just a little depressing because it's so quiet," she told AFP through her mask. "Other Americans are at work," added Republican colleague Deb Fischer. "We need to be here." The 435-member House of Representatives opted not to return this week. Top House Republican Kevin McCarthy said he wants a "hybrid" resumption of House work, including committee hearings, as Washington and the nation debate how and when to open up.

Democratic leaders who control that chamber delayed holding full sessions, citing ongoing health safety concerns and a warning by the congressional physician that the US capital had yet to sufficiently control new coronavirus cases. Those who do return to Capitol Hill are advised by that doctor, Brian Monahan, to practice social distancing, wear masks, limit the number of in-office staff, screen visitors, use hand sanitizer, and avoid shaking hands.

The Senate's return follows a clash of sorts between congressional leaders and President Donald Trump. After lawmakers were told last week that Monahan's office would not be able to test every member of Congress for the virus, Trump's administration offered to conduct the rapid screening.

But in a rare joint message, Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and McConnell on Saturday rejected the offer, stating that the tests should be reserved for the public. Democrats have complained that McConnell was resuming full sessions but not considering legislation this week aimed at addressing the pandemic. — AFP

Activists group aims to counter Trump's virus disinformation

WASHINGTON: A political action committee has launched to counter false and misleading statements about the coronavirus pandemic from US President Donald Trump with a wide-ranging, tech-infused social media campaign. Defeat Disinfo, which started last week, plans to use "a sophisticated set of tools that allows us to spot misinformation just as it's beginning to go viral on social media," according to a statement.

It also aims to promote the "truthful counter narrative" about COVID-19 with tweet-for-tweet responses to limit the impact of inaccurate information. Curtis Houglund, director of the committee and head of a technology firm which has worked to counter online propaganda from Russia and Islamic State extremists, said artificial intelligence would play a role in the effort.

The technology "uses techniques such as natural language processing and machine learning classifiers to determine the emotions, themes and mes-



BOSTON: A protester wears a Trump 2020 face mask during a Reopen Massachusetts Rally outside of the Massachusetts State House in Boston, Massachusetts. — AFP

sages animating the conversation in a predictive way," Houglund said. "The technology is unique in its ability to geo-infer the location of data to understand the attitudes of voters in states such as Wisconsin or Arizona. We also have the ability to identify who has interacted with or been exposed to disinformation."

He said this technology "was incubated and tested at the front-line of ISIS propaganda" and has

been updated for the latest initiative. The committee is not aligned with any candidate but argues that Trump "is denying the facts on his administration's coronavirus response," adding that "we're holding him accountable."

"President Donald Trump is the largest amplifier of disinformation in the United States," said Houglund. "People are dying as a result of his political agenda."

The effort is already in full swing with messages aimed at pointing out the danger of Trump's comments suggesting injecting disinfectant could help fight the coronavirus. Defeat Disinfo said it would not use automated accounts or "bots" to amplify its messages but seek an army of people, including prominent individuals sometimes described as "influencers," to counter the president's narratives.

Houglund said the organization is working to build a network of some 3.4 million "credentialed content creators and social influencers." "The organization will rely on real stories from real people," the group said in a statement. The group said it would "map" tweets from Trump's account which are gaining traction as part of the effort to push back at false claims. Houglund said the organization would be seeking to self-fund, largely with small donations, offering no other details on its finances. — AFP



DUBLIN: Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar (left) speaks to employees during a visit to a novel coronavirus COVID-19 Community Assessment Hub at Dublin City University in Dublin. — AFP

Does virus crisis stoke a case for united Ireland?

DUBLIN: Ireland's coronavirus crisis is often described as an "all-island" emergency, shared with the British territory of Northern Ireland—a sign, some say, that the pandemic has bolstered the long-fought case for unification. As the crisis has unfolded, death counts have often been tallied on an all-island basis—a figure that stood at 1,684 at the start of this week. "It knows no borders and we are all in this together," Irish Health Minister Simon Harris said as the contagion took hold last month.

"It is essential we continue to do everything we can across the island to fight this pandemic," he added. In the decades-long debate over the destiny of Northern Ireland, his comments may be seen as freighted with particular meaning. "Right now, people are viewing the question of Irish unity through the lens of epidemiology," wrote commentator Una Mullally in Britain's Guardian newspaper. "The pandemic is many things, but it is political, and so too will be its consequences."

Cooperation between the jurisdictions of Ireland and Northern Ireland has historically been a thorny matter. The British province to the north is tradi-

tionally divided between republicans who would gladly join the south and unionists who cherish links to the UK mainland. Blood has been spilled over the divide - 3,500 were killed in the three-decade-long conflict known as "The Troubles". The violence largely ended in 1998 with a peace deal that created a devolved government for the province and included a clause to trigger a unity referendum in certain scenarios. But relations between the two sides of the divide have remained fraught.

The COVID-19 emergency has rendered cooperation a medical necessity, however, as the disease spreads without regard for borders. "It's a statement of fact that from an epidemiological point of view it makes sense for the island of Ireland to be as closely aligned as possible," Harris said as Dublin announced a plan on Friday to reopen the nation. He said it was "not for any political reasons" and "purely from a public health point of view". Even among Northern Ireland's most adamant unionists, there have been few publicly dissenting voices. However, despite general promises to cooperate and coordinate, Northern Ireland and the Republic have taken different approaches to tackling the virus. Ireland entered lockdown earlier and placed a strong emphasis on testing. In contrast, Northern Ireland followed Britain's less rigorous regime. Some say the human cost of non-collaboration between the jurisdictions has become clear, as coronavirus cases surge in the Irish counties along the border with Northern Ireland. — AFP

New York Times leads the way at 2020 Pulitzers

NEW YORK: The New York Times picked up the most awards as the 2020 Pulitzer Prize winners were announced virtually on Monday owing to the coronavirus outbreak. Prize board administrator Dana Canedy declared the winners from her living room via a livestream on YouTube rather than at a ceremony at New York's Columbia University.

The Times collected three awards, including for Brian M. Rosenthal's investigative report into New York City's taxi industry that revealed predatory loans that took advantage of vulnerable drivers. It also won the international reporting prize for a series of stories on Russian President Vladimir Putin's regime.

The paper's Nikole Hannah-Jones won best commentary for a personal essay that viewed America's origins through the lens of enslaved Africans. The Pulitzers are generally regarded as the highest honor that US-based journalists and organizations can receive. Reuters won the breaking news photography award for pictures of the Hong Kong protests. The Courier-Journal in Lexington, Kentucky won the breaking news reporting prize for its coverage of hundreds of last-minute pardons from Kentucky Governor Matt Bevin.

The explanatory reporting prize was awarded to the staff of The Washington Post for a series that showed the effects of extreme temperatures on the planet. The Baltimore Sun took home the local reporting accolade for reporting on a financial relationship between the city's mayor and a public hospital system that her office oversaw. Two organizations won the national reporting award: ProPublica for an investigation into a series of accidents in the US Navy and The Seattle Times for coverage that exposed design flaws in Boeing's 737 Max.

Ben Taub of The New Yorker won the feature writing award for a story on a Guantanamo Bay guard's growing friendship with a captor who was tortured. The Associated Press was awarded the feature photography prize for images showing life in the contested Kashmir as India revoked its semi-autonomous status. A special citation was awarded to Ida B Wells, an early pioneer of investigative journalism and a civil rights icon. — AFP

Business

WEDNESDAY, MAY 6, 2020

10 Foreign workers feel the pain of 'corona job cuts' in Japan**11** Working in distress, immigrants keep US poultry plants running**11** Top German judges to rule on massive ECB support

NEW YORK: In this file photo, an American Airlines passenger jet approaches Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport, in Arlington, Virginia. —AFP

Stocks, oil advance as nations reopen

Investors cheer further easing of lockdowns

HONG KONG: Equities and crude rallied yesterday as investors cheered a further easing of lockdowns in some countries, which offset a brewing row between the US and China that some fear could see them renew their trade war. While the global death toll from the coronavirus passed 250,000 and infections approached 3.6 million, there are signs it is easing, allowing governments in Europe and parts of Asia-Pacific as well as some US states to begin allowing some businesses to reopen.

The gains helped markets claw back some of Monday's steep losses, though there remains a sense of caution on fears of a second wave of infections and as traders contemplate a long recovery from the economic destruction. Hong Kong rose 1.1 percent as dealers cheered news that some restrictions would be lifted in the city and brushed off data showing its economy suffered its worst contraction on record in the first quarter. The reading means it is suffering its longest recession since the financial crisis. Sydney gained more than one percent, while Mumbai gained 0.8 percent and Taipei edged up 0.5 percent. Singapore piled on 0.7 percent and Manila jumped 1.9 percent.

Jakarta added 0.8 percent despite data showing the Indonesian economy grew in the first quarter at its weakest pace in almost two decades.

In early trade, London, Paris and Frankfurt surged

around two percent. Tokyo, Seoul and Shanghai were all closed for public holidays. Dealers were keeping tabs on China-US relations after Donald Trump hit out at Beijing over its handling of the outbreak, saying it began in a Wuhan lab, but so far offering no evidence.



US-China trade row could resurface

The comments, and his warning he could hit China with fresh tariffs, fanned fears of a repeat of the standoff between the economic superpowers that battered markets last year. Beijing has not officially responded to the comments, though state broadcaster CCTV hit out at Secretary of State Mike Pompeo who repeated the lab claim. CCTV described him as "evil" and "wanton spewing poison".

'Policy reactions'

Stephen Innes of AxiCorp said: "It remains to be seen if (Monday's) equity market weakness was a bump in the road or the start of something more sinister as coronavirus blame-game and a looming US presidential election are a toxic recipe for US-China relations." However, others said the issue was not likely to play on dealers' minds too much for now. "At this point of time we think this is more of a risk to monitor rather than something that breaks the fundamental economic story," Chetan Ahya, at Morgan Stanley, told BloombergTV.

"We are more focused on... the policy reactions which every government and central bank is taking up and I think that's a more important driver right now for the economy." The easing of restrictions fanned a 10 percent rise in US oil, which had endured a torrid April, with signs of a pick-up in demand helped by massive output cuts by key producers that are beginning to kick in.

ANZ Bank said the market was lifted by "hopes that the worst is behind it following the devastating level of demand destruction due to COVID-19". Energy data provider Genscape said stockpiles at the main US oil depot in Cushing, Oklahoma had increased by only 1.8 million barrels last week following weeks of major rises. ANZ, however, cautioned that "the market is still struggling to find a balance amid weak demand". —AFP

Spain's jobless rate slows, but 5.2m claim benefits

MADRID: Unemployment in Spain rose again in April, pushing the number of people depending on unemployment benefits to a record 5.2 million as one of the world's strictest coronavirus lockdowns brought the economy to a halt. The number of people in Spain registering as jobless rose by 7.97 percent in April from a month earlier, or by 282,891 people, leaving 3.8 million people out of work, the Labour Ministry said yesterday. The number of registered jobless people had risen in March by 9.31 percent.

The cost of the benefits paid to the 5.2 million people fully or partly depending on unemployment benefits in April skyrocketed 207 percent from a year earlier to 4.5 billion euros. "It is the highest spending in the history" of the unemployment services in Spain, Secretary of State for Employment Joaquin Perez Rey told a news conference. Including furloughed workers and people on medical leave, as many as 7 million people are depending on the state, almost 30 percent of the working population, according to data that Spain has sent to Brussels with economic forecasts for 2020. The figure of fully unemployed people, at 3.8 million, is still far from the record of more than 5 million reached in 2013 at the trough of the financial crisis that hit the country a decade ago.

The April data show Spain had a monthly average of 548,000 fewer jobs in April than in April 2019. In the last two weeks of March, the country's economy shed almost 900,000 jobs.

The government is asking to look at the development of the labor market since the last day of March. With this metric, the net job loss would be only 49,000 jobs. "Following March data, when the COVID-19 impact was very significant, the labor market stabilized in April, with a slight decline in employment", Jose Luis Escrivá, Minister of Social Security said in a tweet.

Most of the lost employment was on a fixed-term contract. More than half of the job losses have been suffered by people under 35. Data in some sectors such as agriculture and construction began to improve at the end of April. The regions most affected by the fall in employment are those with a high dependence on tourism, such as Andalusia.

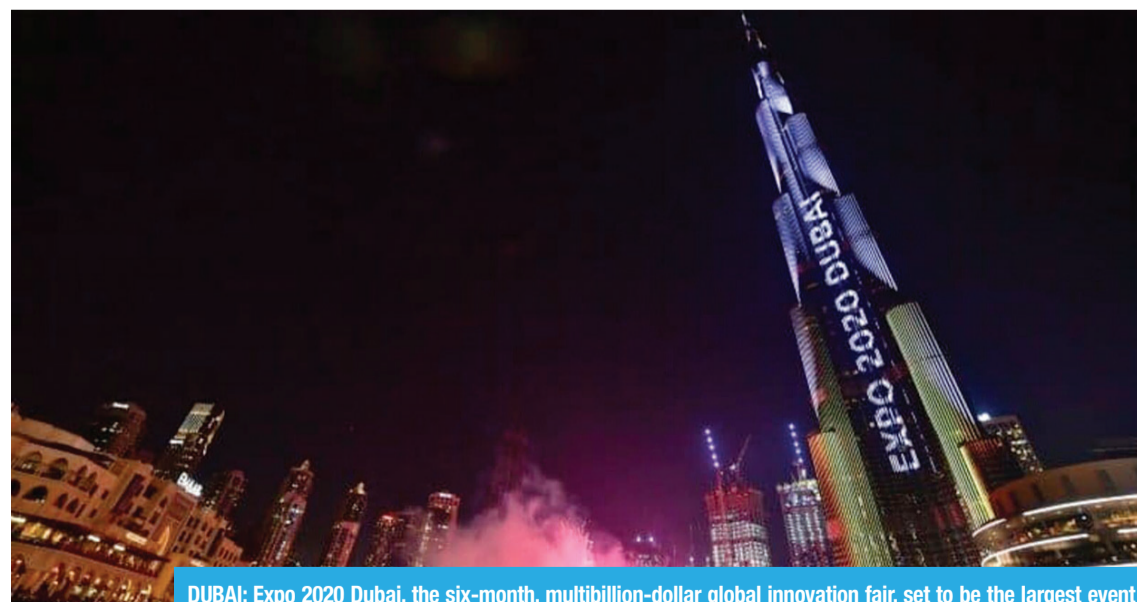
During the whole month of April, the country was under lockdown, with practically all retail and tourism closed. Spain is one of the countries hardest hit by the outbreak in the world, with more than 25,000 deaths. The Spanish government updated the economic forecast for 2020, with a historical contraction of 9.2 percent and a gradual recovery by 2021. —Reuters

Expo 2020 Dubai postponed to Oct 2021

PARIS: The Expo 2020 global trade fair, hosted by Dubai, has been postponed by a year due to the coronavirus outbreak and will be held from October 1, 2021, to March 31, 2022, the Paris-based organizer said Monday. The six-month, multibillion-dollar global innovation fair, set to be the largest event ever staged in the Arab world, was expected to attract some 24 million visitors starting October 20 this year.

But a two-thirds majority of member states of the Bureau International des Expositions (BIE) voted in favor of a delay requested by the United Arab Emirates, which the body said "allows all participants to safely navigate the impact of COVID-19." "Expo 2020 Dubai is gearing up to help shape a post-pandemic world and create a better future for all," the bureau said in a statement. The delay "also allows the World Expo to focus on a collective desire for new thinking to identify solutions to some of the greatest challenges of our time."

Dubai, the glitzy city-state which is part of the United Arab Emirates and is known for hosting hundreds of conferences annually, has already scrapped a string of cultural and entertainment events amid



DUBAI: Expo 2020 Dubai, the six-month, multibillion-dollar global innovation fair, set to be the largest event ever staged in the Arab world, was expected to attract some 24 million visitors starting October 20 this year.

the pandemic that has claimed more than 246,000 lives around the world to date.

Unable to meet in a general assembly due to epidemic restrictions, BIE member states voted remotely on the delay. The vote technically remains open until May 29, but the required two-thirds threshold for approving the postponement was

reached within a week of voting opening on April 24, the statement said. They also voted to retain the name Expo 2020 Dubai. It will be the first World Expo held in the BIE's Middle East, Africa and South Asia (MEASA) region, welcoming 192 countries, plus businesses, multilateral organizations and educational establishments. —AFP

Business

Foreign workers feel the pain of 'corona job cuts' in Japan

Weaker support network, language barriers hurdles

TSU, Japan: Eight years after arriving from Brazil, Rennan Yamashita sat in a government office in central Japan, filling out forms for unemployment insurance after losing his job for the ninth or 10th time - he has lost count. Some weeks earlier, he was laid off from his job at a car parts factory. He only held that job for four months.

"If they need you, they hire you; if they don't need you, they'll fire you. It's simple like that," said Yamashita, 31. The coronavirus pandemic has hit Japan's economy hard and many factories, including those of carmakers, are scaling back production. Foreign workers are particularly vulnerable, with a weaker support network and language barriers that prevent them from seeking government help.

Union groups, labor lawyers and nonprofit organizations say foreign workers such as Yamashita are the first to lose jobs in "corona cuts", which they fear may expand to the kind of mass layoffs seen in the 2008 financial crisis. Last month, the Japan Center for Economic Research estimated that if Japan's GDP contracted by 25 percent this year, the unemployment rate would reach 5 percent and about 2 million people could lose their jobs.

In March and April, a labor organization based in Mie, a manufacturing center about 300km west of Tokyo, received 400 consultations from laborers who were affected by the coronavirus. About 330 were foreign workers.

"Foreign workers on short-term contracts are laid off first," because they're easier to fire, Union Mie organizer Akai Jimbu said. Last year, 34.5 per-

cent of foreign employees in Mie were temporary workers, compared with the national average of 2.5 percent.

"It's almost like they're hired so that they can be fired when the going gets tough," Jimbu said. "They're just a spare bolt in the eyes of the employer."

'First to go'

Japan has become increasingly reliant on foreign labor. With a third of its population over 65 and a smaller working population, the government has eased some immigration restrictions.

More than 1.6 million foreign workers supported the Japanese economy as of October 2019 - a four-fold increase from 2008. A labour ministry official told Reuters the ministry does not officially track the number of foreign workers laid off because it provides "support to all workers" regardless of their nationality. Still, the government recently allocated 370 million yen (\$3.46 million) to improve multilingual support for foreigners at unemployment offices and online.

But most foreign workers don't turn to the government for help. While Union Mie handled hundreds of consultations this year through mid-April, the local labor ministry office saw only seven. Kaori Nakao, a Japanese-Brazilian woman, sought help from the union when her employer laid her off from a car component factory at the end of March. The company told her she was being fired because of coronavirus-related production cuts. Nakao, 38, was also ordered to leave her company apartment.

2 million jobs could be lost



TOKYO: This long exposure picture shows passenger trains travelling through Nippori railway station in Tokyo. —AFP

Pregnant with her fourth child and with no savings, she asked Union Mie for help.

Last month, union members and Nakao protested outside her employer's office and the Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Thermal Systems factory where she worked. Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Thermal Systems declined to comment because it did not employ Nakao. "I just want to work," Nakao said. "I have zero money and I can't even buy food for my children." Yamashita, who is still looking for

jobs, said he had found an open position at another car parts factory a few weeks ago.

The contract was only for three months - maybe even less. Still, Yamashita said, it was something. He interviewed for the job, and was looking forward to a respite from searching.

But then he got a call. The position wasn't available anymore. "We are the first to go," he says of foreigners working in Japan. "I already know about that." —Reuters

Uber's Mideast business Careem cuts 31% staff

DUBAI: Uber Technologies' Careem subsidiary said on Monday it was cutting 536 jobs this week, representing 31 percent of the Dubai-headquartered company's workforce. The announcement came hours after Uber said it was shuttering its Eats delivery business in several markets, including the Middle East, and laying off dozens of staff.

Careem, which operates ride-hailing and delivery businesses primarily in the Middle East, said it was prioritising the security of the company and that parent Uber continued to believe in its business model and was committed to the region. "As we have discussed several times in the last few weeks, the crisis brought on by COVID-19 has put our dream and future impact at significant risk," Chief Executive Mudassar Sheikh said in a blog on Careem's website.

Sheikha, who founded the company in 2012, said business was down by more than 80 percent and that it was "alarmingly unknown" when it would recover. "In this new reality, the surest way to secure Careem for the long term is to drive towards self-sustainability within a reasonable time frame," he said.

Careem did not say how much it expected to save from the layoffs or which business units staff had been cut from. However, it said tech-colleagues were protected in relative terms so it could continue to invest in its products. Affected employees would receive at least three months severance pay, a month of equity vesting and in some cases extended visa and medical insurance, including for family members, until the end of the year.

The Careem BUS mass-transportation operation has also been suspended, it said. Careem has also found "significant savings" from pausing new benefits, it said without disclosing details. Uber earlier announced it was closing its food delivery business in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and other countries, while its United Arab Emirates operations would move to Careem. Global ride-hailing group Uber bought Careem in 2019 for \$3.1 billion. —Reuters

Oil collapse wipes out Total profits

PARIS: Total said yesterday its quarterly profit fell by 99 percent because of dropping oil prices and announced it would slash investments in response to ongoing turmoil in crude markets. The French oil major reported a net profit of \$34 million for the first quarter, against \$3.1 billion a year earlier. Oil prices suffered a sharp drop in the first quarter due to overproduction and a price war between Saudi Arabia and Russia, falling to \$50.1 from \$63.1 a year earlier.

The sharp fall in oil and gas prices depressed Total's cash flow from operations by nearly two thirds. Since the end of March, oil has been hit further by a collapse in demand due to the economic impact of the coronavirus, even going negative at one point last month, when sellers had to pay buyers to take oil off their hands. "The Group is facing exceptional circumstances: The Covid-19 health crisis which is affecting the world economy and creating major uncertainties, and the oil market crisis, with the sharp drop in oil prices since March," CEO Patrick Pouyanné said in a statement. —AFP

Indonesia economy sees weakest growth in almost 2 decades

JAKARTA: Indonesia's economy grew in the first quarter at its slowest pace for almost two decades, and economists warned yesterday the coronavirus crisis would likely deal an even greater blow in the next three months. The news comes as governments around the world struggle to contain the deadly disease, which has essentially shut down the global economy, which is expected to fall into recession this year. Southeast Asia's biggest economy grew 2.97 percent in January-February, the worst rate since 2001 and well short of the 5.07 percent in the same period last year. It also missed forecasts of four percent expansion, while marking a contraction of 2.41 percent from the previous quarter.

Statistics agency chairman Suhariyanto, who goes by one name, said in a virtual news conference: "No countries are immune to the COVID-19. Whether developed or developing countries, they were hit badly by the virus and Indonesia is no exception." The statistics agency pointed to a severe hit to the key tourism sector, saying only 2.6 million visitors went to Indonesia in the three months, down a third on-year.

And analysts warned of more pain ahead. "GDP growth in Indonesia held up better than elsewhere in the first quarter, at least according to the official figures, but we doubt this resilience will last", warned Capital Economics in a note.

"Indonesia was later than other countries to lock down its economy, meaning more of the hit will have fallen in the second quarter," it said, adding that it expects a "large contraction" in April-June.

China's young spenders say #ditchyourstuff

BEIJING: Tang Yue, a 27-year-old teacher from the city of Guilin in southwest China, steam-presses a blue dress and takes dozens of photographs before picking one to clinch her 200th online sale.

For a growing number of Chinese like Tang, hit by job losses, furloughs and salary cuts, the consumer economy has begun to spin in reverse. They are no longer buying - they are selling. Instead of emerging from the coronavirus epidemic and returning to the shopping habits that helped drive the world's second-largest economy, many young people are offloading possessions and embracing a new-found ethic for hard times: less is more. With Tang's monthly salary of about 7,000 yuan (\$988), the self-described shopaholic said she has bought everything from Chanel lipsticks to Apple's latest iPad in the past three years.

But the adrenaline rush that comes with binge-shopping is gone, said Tang, whose wages have been slashed with the suspension of all the classes on tourism management she usually teaches.

"The coronavirus outbreak was a wake-up call," she said. "When I saw the collapse of so many industries, I realized I had no financial buffer should something unfortunate happen to me." There is no guarantee that the nascent minimalist trend will continue once the coronavirus crisis is fully over, but if it does, it could seriously damage China's consumer sector and hurt thousands of businesses from big retailers to street-corner restaurants, gyms and beauty salons.

To be sure, there are signs that pent-up demand will drive a rush of spending as authorities reopen malls, leisure venues and tourist spots. In South Korea, the first major economy outside of China to be hit by the virus, people thronged malls this weekend to go "revenge shopping" to make up for time lost in lockdown. There are some signs that a similar trend will take hold in China, where some upscale malls are starting to get busy, although luxury firm Kering SA - which owns Gucci, Balenciaga and other fashion brands - has said it is hard to predict how or when sales in China might come back.

A recent McKinsey & Co survey showed that between 20 percent and 30 percent of respondents in China said they would continue to be cautious, either consuming slightly less or, in a few cases, a lot less. "The lockdown provided consumers with a lot

of time and reasons to reflect and consider what is important to them," said Mark Tanner, managing director at Shanghai-based research and marketing consultancy China Skinny.

"With much more of their days spent in their homes, consumers also have more time and reasons to sort through things they don't feel they need - so they're not living around clutter that is common in many apartments."

#DITCHYOURSTUFF

Tang made a spreadsheet to keep track of her nearly 200 cosmetic products and hundreds of pieces of clothing. She then marked a few essentials in red that she wanted to keep. In the past two months, she has sold items worth nearly 5,000 yuan on second-hand marketplaces online. Bargain-hunting online has become a new habit for some Chinese as the stigma that once hung over second-hand goods has begun to fade.

Idle Fish, China's biggest online site for used goods, hit a record daily transaction volume in March, its parent company Alibaba told Reuters. Government researchers predict that transactions for used goods in China may top 1 trillion yuan (\$141 billion) this year.

Posts with the hashtag #ditchyourstuff have trended on Chinese social media in recent weeks, garner-

toll is widely believed to be much higher as it has one of the lowest testing rates in the world.

The ban on sea travel could hamper the movement of millions in a country of some 17,000 islands where passenger ferries are a key mode of transportation. The government had already called on residents of major cities, including the capital Jakarta, to stay put. —AFP



JAKARTA: A general view shows residential and commercial buildings in Jakarta yesterday. Indonesia's economy grew in the first quarter at its slowest pace for almost two decades, and economists warned on May 5 the coronavirus crisis would likely deal an even greater blow in the next three months. —AFP

ing more than 140 million views.

Jiang Zhuoyue, 31, who works as an accountant at a traditional Chinese medicine company in Beijing - one of the few industries that may benefit from the health crisis - has also decided to turn to a simpler life. "I used to shop too much and could be easily lured by discounts," said Jiang. "One time Sephora offered 20 percent off for all goods, I then bought a lot of cosmetics because I feel I'm losing money if I don't."

Jiang, the mother of a 9-month-old baby, said she recently sold nearly 50 pieces of used clothing as the lockdown gave her the opportunity to clear things out. "It also offered me a chance to rethink what's essential to me, and the importance of doing financial planning," she said.

Eleven Li, a 23-year-old flight attendant, said she used to spend her money on all manner of celebrity-endorsed facial masks, snacks, concert tickets and social media activity, but now has no way to fund her spending. "I just found a new job late last year, then COVID-19 came along, and I haven't been able to fly once since I joined, and I've gotten no salary at all," said Li, who said she was trying to sell her Kindle. Some are even selling their pets, as they consider leaving big cities like Beijing and Shanghai where the high cost of living is finally catching up with them. —Reuters

Business

Working in distress, immigrants keep US poultry plants running

Low-paid workers essential for the strategic sector

SALISBURY: Tina says a little prayer every time she heads to work at a Delaware poultry plant, a plea that this will not be the day that the invisible killer picking off her colleagues comes for her.

With the coronavirus shutting down meat plants and threatening the country's food supply, she would rather not be there at all, but President Donald Trump has designated the sector as strategic, and low-paid workers like her as essential. The 27-year-old mother works shifts at the Perdue packing plant in Georgetown, a major employer among the thousands of fellow Haitians settled in the area. If she wants to hold on to her job, she feels she has little choice but to clock in for her shifts, despite the risk to her and her family. "Every day I come, I just pray to God that nothing happens," said Tina—one of few workers who would agree to speak to a reporter, although even she declined to provide her full name for fear of reprisals.

“

I want to
Go home

”

"I want to go home, I have three kids at home, a baby, but I can't do that," she told AFP, speaking behind a mask. "I have no choice, bills are coming from left to right."

With no way of knowing who might be carrying the virus, "everyone is afraid of getting sick, people still works close together." "They don't tell us who has been tested positive. Was that person beside me, talking to me, you never know." Tina believes too little was done, too late, to protect workers like her. "I just think that they should close a few weeks so they can clean the

whole plant," she said. The number of coronavirus infections has recently soared in the Delmarva peninsula, which reaches south out of Delaware to eastern Maryland and the northeast of Virginia.

The poultry packing industry has thrived off the cheap labor provided by Haitians and Hispanics, but it also has meant that they have been the first to be cut down by the disease.

Fear of hospitals

The small town of Salisbury, the historic base of Perdue, is home to a community of some 5,000 Haitians, at least 40 percent of whom are infected, according to Habacuc Petion, the owner of Oasis radio, which broadcasts in Creole to an estimated 20,000 listeners in the Delmarva area.

Many work for Perdue, and are refusing to stay home for fear of being sacked. "Even if they have fever, they take a pill and go to work," said Petion. "COVID-19 touched home," said the 45-year-old. "My cousin was 44, working at Perdue plant. Beginning of April, he could not breathe, his wife convinced the medics to take him to the hospital. In less than two weeks he died."

The disease's toll has also been boosted by a fear of hospitals and by the language barrier for many Haitians, doctors said. "When they see people dying in New York hospitals, the lack of material and people put in dumps, they are scared thinking they won't receive the care they need and end up dying," said Nadya Julien, a Haitian nurse practitioner in Laurel, Delaware.

Some who speak Creole but little English have trouble explaining their symptoms, she said.

She herself contracted the disease and was hospitalized for six days in April, a story she tells her patients to help them overcome their fears.

'Temptation'

Nurse practitioner Emanie Dorival said she alerted the local authorities very early to the number of cases



SALISBURY: The company logo and address are seen on a building on the parking lot outside the Perdue Farms Chicken and poultry processing factory in Salisbury, Maryland. — AFP

piling up in her surgery in Seaford, Delaware. "We are a rural area," she said. "We don't have the capacity in our hospitals if 200 cases show up." While she agrees the poultry industry is "essential" she says "there is a way to keep it safe for the workers and the community."

Several major US plants where farmers send cattle, pigs and poultry have shut due to the rapid spread of COVID-19 between employees, who are often in close proximity on production lines and on breaks.

Faced with the threat of disruption to the nation's food supply, Trump has ordered meat and poultry plants to remain open during the pandemic that has

claimed almost 70,000 lives. Perdue has said it is doing all it can to ensure workers' safety, taking temperatures, providing protective equipment and practicing social distancing on the production line. Where it is impossible to keep workers a safe distance apart, it said it has installed screens.

It also increased workers' wages—which Petion described as "a temptation that a lot of people can't resist." Local health authorities are meanwhile stepping up testing for the virus, with factory workers at the front of the line. In Salisbury, some 1,500 people underwent tests on Friday and Saturday at the town's sports stadium. The results are expected this week. — AFP



Costas Gogos, owner of a tavern in the port of Rafina near Athens, has a coffee at his closed for customers tavern. Many Greek businesses fear the damage will be irreparable, especially with minimum two-meter (6.5-foot) social distancing requirements squeezing out customers. — AFP

Greece sees July tourism reboot

ATHENS: Greece's prime minister on Monday said the country's vital tourist season could conditionally kick off in July as coronavirus lockdown restrictions begin to ease for the first time in six weeks.

"Best-case scenario is Greece is open for business July 1, and we're working towards that," Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis told CNN. Mitsotakis said Greece would accept visitors only under "very specific protocols", possibly with pre-travel testing agreed at the EU level, and "provided that the global epidemic is on a downward path." Greece has officially announced more than 2,600 infections and 146 deaths, but the country of 11 million has so far carried out only around 81,000 tests.

With the loss of critical tourism income, the Greek economy could contract by as much as 10 percent this year, according to the International Monetary Fund. The Greek finance ministry says the downturn can be limited to 4.7 percent, but unemployment could hit nearly 20 percent.

Under remaining lockdown rules, open-air archaeological sites and theme parks are not set to reopen until May 18, followed by year-round hotels and restaurants on June 1.

But many operators—especially restaurant owners and hoteliers—see the move as futile owing to strict spacing

concerns. In most cases, people are supposed to be at least 1.5 metres (five feet) apart.

"We can't accommodate more than four people at a time. That's 11 customers per day maximum," said Marie Lavigne, co-owner of a hair salon in the affluent Athens district of Kolonaki.

Nikos Kontos, owner of an Athens electronics store, noted that he had no high expectations as "many Greeks have been furloughed and have neither the means nor the inclination to go shopping."

Monday's reopening benefitted about 10 percent of small businesses including hair salons, bookstores, opticians and florists. Churches were also reopened but only for solitary prayer.

The remaining retail stores will follow on May 11, as the government cautiously evaluates the situation on a weekly basis. "This is where the difficult phase starts. Returning to a new normality seems like coming out of a labyrinth," government spokesman Stelios Petsas said Monday.

Mitsotakis said Greeks had shown "discipline and a very high sense of responsibility and solidarity" but now must be "doubly careful". "As we now move on to the next phase... individual responsibility becomes even more important," the PM said earlier in the day as he briefed President Katerina Sakellariopoulou. Also Monday, the government said virus testing would be boosted with mobile teams that will prioritise vulnerable, closed facilities such as prisons and homes for the elderly.

They will also help track contacts of confirmed virus cases, he said. The first 25 testing teams—which will eventually grow to 500 — began operating Monday. — AFP

Delhi slaps 70% 'corona tax' on alcohol

NEW DELHI: Officials in India's capital imposed a special tax of 70% on retail liquor purchases from yesterday, to deter large gatherings at stores as authorities ease a six-week lockdown imposed to slow the spread of the coronavirus. Taxes on alcohol are a key contributor to the revenue of many of India's 36 states and federal territories, most of which are running short of funds because of the lengthy disruption in economic activity caused by the virus.

Police baton-charged hundreds of people who had flocked to liquor shops when they opened on Monday for the first time in a relaxation of the world's biggest lockdown, which is set to run until May 17. The Delhi state government announced the "special corona fee" in a public notice late on Monday.

"It was unfortunate that chaos was seen at some shops in Delhi," said Arvind Kejriwal, the state's chief minister.

"If we come to know about violations of social distancing and other norms from any area, then we will have to seal the area and revoke the relaxations there," he added. Other states, such as southern Andhra Pradesh, where people also violated social distancing measures to queue up in their hundreds for alcohol, also hiked prices. The increases come as India reported 3,900 new infections yesterday for its highest single day rise, taking the tally to 46,432. The death toll stood at 1,568, the health ministry said. Health experts said the daily increase shows India remains at risk despite a severe lockdown that has confined its population of 1.3 billion to their homes since late March, with all public transport halted and economic activity nearly frozen.

"The curve has not shown a downward trend. That is cause for concern," said Dr Randeep Guleria, director of New Delhi's premier All-India Institute of Medical Sciences.

India's average daily increase in cases has been 6.1 over the past week, behind Russia and Brazil but higher than Britain, the United States and Italy. The biggest spikes were recorded in the western states of Maharashtra, home to India's commercial capital of Mumbai, and Gujarat as well as Delhi. These densely populated urban centres drive India's economy, powered by armies of migrant workers.

Government officials said the lockdown had helped avert a surge of infections that could have overwhelmed medical services, however. Now cases are doubling every 12 days, up from 3.4 days when the lockdown began, said Lav Agarwal, a joint secretary in the health ministry. — Reuters

Top German judges to rule on massive ECB support

FRANKFURT Main: Germany's top court will rule on mass bond-buying by the European Central Bank, a tool the Frankfurt institution has deployed like never before to cushion the impact of the coronavirus.

"Will Germany's supreme court constrain the European Central Bank's response to the worst ever peacetime recession in Europe?" asked economist Holger Schmieding of Berenberg bank.

Judges are expected to issue their ruling at 0800 GMT in Karlsruhe, when Andreas Vosskuhle—president of the second senate of the Constitutional Court—reads the verdict. At issue are so-called "quantitative easing" (QE) asset purchases, first launched in 2015 to support the eurozone economy and stoke inflation towards the ECB's just-below-two-percent goal. Reaching over 2.6 trillion euros (\$2.8 trillion) before a pause through most of 2019, QE was reactivated late last year as trade wars, Brexit and other headwinds sapped the eurozone economy.

By March, an ECB confronted with the coronavirus crisis had upped planned purchases from 20 billion euros per month to over one trillion over the full year, including with a "Pandemic Emergency Purchase Programme" (PEPP) worth 750 billion alone. That specific new tool is not targeted in the lawsuit to be decided later.

'Monetary financing'

Among the plaintiffs in the case are economist and former head of far-right populist party AfD Bernd Lucke, as well as Peter Gauweiler, a former senior member of Bavaria's conservative CSU party, and Patrick Adenauer, grandson of the founding post-World War II chancellor Konrad.

They hope to establish that with QE, the ECB has violated a rule against so-called "monetary financing" of states laid down in European Union treaty, which largely limits the central bank to ensuring price stability. Foreseeing this objection from the start, the ECB only buys government debt on the secondary market, rather than direct from national capitals.

But that may not be enough to convince the German judges, even after a 2018 ruling from the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) that QE is legal.

It was the Karlsruhe court that asked the CJEU for its opinion, and the body could follow their European colleagues' ruling.

"We do not expect the court to rule that the ECB's 'Public Sector Purchase Programme' (PSPP) violates the German constitution," Berenberg economist Schmieding said.

"Such a step could otherwise trigger serious turmoil in markets as well as an unprecedented clash between German and EU law." While the Constitutional Court cannot directly bind the ECB, it could forbid Germany's powerful national central bank from taking part in PSPP asset purchases.

Risk to the eurozone?

Bereft of its weightiest buyer on the market, a quantitative easing so weakened by the judges would "surely bring the existence of the eurozone at risk," warned Erik Nielsen, chief economist of UniCredit.

"Without doubt, the Constitutional Court knows this, and it's not an outcome they would want to trigger," Nielsen added. But even without declaring the whole bond-buying scheme illegal, "the court could spell out conditions... that could make it more difficult for the bank to use this part of its monetary toolkit flexibly and efficiently," said Schmieding.

New bounds on ECB intervention could be carried over to the new coronavirus crisis-fighting PEPP, which the central bank has declared not subject to limits like how much of any one eurozone nation's debt it can buy. Some hope comes from an earlier ruling by the Constitutional Court in favour of the financial crisis-era "OMT" scheme, which has never been used.

But if lead judge Vosskuhle hopes to go out with a bang before his last day in office on Wednesday, now could be his moment. — AFP



The flags of the European Union flutter in front of the headquarters of the European Central Bank (ECB) in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany. — AFP

Bank group raises questions on debt relief

RIYADH: Despite the worthy goal of helping the poorest nations during the coronavirus pandemic, an international banking association has raised concerns about their ability to join in a plan to suspend debt payments. The Group of 20 governments last month agreed to a one-year debt standstill that the IMF and World Bank had pushed for to help the 76 most vulnerable economies, and called on private creditors to join in. In a letter to the IMF, World Bank and Paris Club

of creditor governments released Monday, the president of the Institute for International Finance (IIF), Tim Adams, praised the decision but highlighted the challenges.

There is a concern that halting debt payments could cause the debt ratings agencies to downgrade the countries involved, or that it could impair borrowing capacity by the countries that participate, Adams said, in the letter dated May 1. There is "a deep appreciation for the challenges facing these most

vulnerable countries and strong interest in finding ways to support them and the proposed debt service suspension."

However, Adams said, there are many types of private creditors and "many will have fiduciary duties to their own clients, and contractual obligations." Likewise, the position of each of the borrowers is unique. "Any effective approach to voluntary creditor/lender participation must take this into account," Adams said. — AFP

Coronavirus sets a balancing act between science, politics

PARIS: Should science alone dictate policy on how to cope with the coronavirus pandemic? Governments worldwide are grappling with this thorny question as they loosen lockdowns that have tested the tensile strength of communities and economies alike. Stay-at-home orders have clearly saved lives by reducing the number of new COVID-19 patients streaming into overwhelmed hospitals. But measures to protect health have come at a steep economic and social cost.

Even among scientists, opinions are divided. "If we want COVID-19 to be a bad memory and not a current nightmare, scientific advice must be prioritized in all political decisions, period," said Sara N. Bleich, a professor of public health policy at the Harvard Chan School of Public Health.

But Simon Chauchemez, a mathematical modeler and a member of the scientific committee advising France's top leaders, said science is not the only factor in the equation. "As scientists we try to shed light, but at the end of the day it is the politicians who have to make decisions," he said. The competing interests and hard choices facing leaders are coming into sharp focus as they set new rules - different in every country, and sometimes from one sub-region to the next - for sheltering-in-place, public gatherings and the businesses that should be allowed to reopen.

In Britain, the government of Boris Johnson has been sharply criticized for its late response to the pandemic. "We scientists said lock down," Helen Warn, a professor of public health at Imperial College London, said in a commentary. "But UK politicians refused to listen." In Germany, Chancellor Angela Merkel - widely praised for her management of the pandemic - has paid close attention to the scientists.

"It helps that she's a scientist and can handle numbers," said Christian Drosten, head of the Institute of Virology at Charite Hospital in Berlin, noting that



SAINT-MANDE: Inhabitants applaud at 20:00 along with others across the French nation, to show their support to healthcare employees in Saint-Mande, a Paris suburb during the 49th day of a lockdown in France aimed at curbing the spread of the COVID-19 disease, caused by the novel coronavirus. — AFP

Merkel has a PhD in quantum chemistry. At the same time, Merkel has encountered criticism for pushing hard to keep stringent shelter-in-place requirements in place.

"When I hear that all other considerations must take a back seat to the protection of human life, I find that kind of absolutism unjustified," Wolfgang Schauble, president of Germany's Bundestag, or parliament, told the Tagesspiegel newspaper. In France, opposition politicians and some public intellectuals

have similarly criticized President Emmanuel Macron for hiding behind the opinions of scientists.

"Be careful not to make health the absolute value," said philosopher Andre Comte-Sponville in a radio interview. "And don't expect doctors to solve all of our problems." And yet Macron's government has also been attacked for green-lighting the gradual reopening of primary schools across France starting on May 11 despite the recommendation of his own science advisory body to keep them closed until September.

Macron's decision "is not really that shocking," said Pierre-Louis Druais, a neighborhood doctor and member of the advisory panel. "We set the general direction, but it probably wouldn't be very healthy if society were entirely run by scientists," he said. "Our role is to provide health advice," Arnaud Fontanet, another member of the scientific advisory panel, told lawmakers last week. "The role of politicians is to make decisions based not just on what we say but on a raft of social and economic considerations in which we have no say."

"I am opposed to a government of doctors," said emergency physician Mathias Wargon, whose wife is a junior minister in the French government. "And tomorrow - when the issue on the table is jobs - I'll be against a government by corporate leaders." It is important for elected politicians to call the shots, Wargon added, noting that myriad unknowns about the new coronavirus have caused disagreement among experts.

This is one reason most countries hit hard by the pandemic - including France, Italy, Spain and the United States - have created special advisory bodies to sift through the thousands of reports and studies already released. Britain's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE), created in 2014 to cope with the Ebola epidemic, was reactivated for this purpose.

The US Coronavirus Task Force is unusual in that its daily press conferences have, with rare exception, been dominated by US President Donald Trump. Sometimes Trump is in open disagreement with respected members of the task force such as immunologist Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, and Deborah Birx, the US global AIDS coordinator, especially on the issue of how, where and when to ease lockdowns. — AFP

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Academic Certificates – Training

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- (IFSO) member .
- Faculty member of (BEST).
- Member of Kuwait Surgical Association.

Scope of clinical Practice.

- Bariatric surgeries.
- Gallbladder stones surgeries.
- Abdominal wall and hernia surgeries.
- G.I. surgeries.
- Thyroid and para - thyroid surgeries.
- Anal surgeries.

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Lifestyle | Features

Spain's Reina Sofia museum prepares to reopen in pandemic era

The halls are eerily quiet at Madrid's Reina Sofia, Spain's most visited museum, as a solitary art restorer looks after its star attraction — Pablo Picasso's anti-war masterpiece "Guernica". Like all of Spain's museums, the modern art museum housed in a former hospital has been closed since mid-March due to a nationwide lockdown to contain one of the world's deadliest coronavirus outbreaks. But with the restrictions starting to be eased, it is getting ready to reopen — hopefully in a month — with new social distancing and hygiene regulations in place for the pandemic age. Museums must "convey the message that there is no need to fear others," said the Reina Sofia's director, Manuel Borja-Villel.

Visitors will move through the multi-story building on a circular path so as not to cross by one another, cameras will take people's temperature and dispensers for hand sanitiser will be distributed across the museum, he told AFP. Paper maps and brochures will no longer be available as they can transmit germs, and visitors will instead be able to download an info app on their own smartphones. "There will be nothing that people can touch," said Borja-Villel. After weeks of confinement, visiting museums can help to revive public life, he added. "It is important to transmit this



Spanish Mari Carmen Pinedo Cazorla, 54, security guard, poses in front of Pablo Picasso's masterpiece Guernica at the Reina Sofia museum in Madrid on April 23, 2020 amid a national lockdown to fight the spread of the coronavirus COVID-19.—AFP

joy of being with others, this idea that human beings, by definition, are not alone," he said.

Less big exhibitions?

The Reina Sofia received 4.4 million visitors in 2019, half of them from outside Spain, but it fears it

will see a 30 percent fall in revenues this year because of the coronavirus lockdown. The government has ordered museums to restrict admissions to a third of their capacity when they do re-open to ensure social distancing rules are respected. Borja-Villel predicts museums will have to move away from their current model based on holding a series of "big exhibitions" and adopt a more long-term strategy.

While the Reina Sofia is closed to the public, restoration work continues. "We must remain to ensure works remain in good shape," said the museum's chief restorer, Jorge Garcia Gomez-Tejedor, who wore a face mask as he inspected "Guernica", the emblematic painting depicting the horrors of Spain's 1936-39 civil war. The Reina Sofia, along with the nearby Prado and the Thyssen museums, form a so-called "Golden Triangle of Art" which is one of the Spanish capital's top tourism draws.

Digital transformation

The Prado — Spain's national museum which is home to paintings by Spanish masters such as El Greco, Velazquez and Goya — fears a 70 percent drop in revenues this year, said its communications director Carlos Chaguaceda. Around 60 percent of

its visitors are foreigners, with a significant number from the United States, he added. The Prado was already forced to reschedule all of the temporary exhibitions it had planned for this year due to problems in receiving loans of works from other museums during the pandemic, which has brought air traffic to a halt.

At the Thyssen, the pandemic has been "a trigger for the digital transformation" at the institution, said its executive director, Evelio Acevedo. During the lockdown the museum boosted the amount of its online content, by for example providing a virtual tour of a temporary exhibition of portraits by Dutch master Rembrandt led by the show's curator. The "Rembrandt and Amsterdam portraiture" exhibition opened on February 18 and had initially been set to run until May 24, but it will likely now be extended to the end of August. This sort of free online content won't stem an expected 60 percent drop in revenues this year but they are helping to launch "a transformation process that will last years," said Acevedo.—AFP



In this file photo Nicolas Cage speaks onstage during the 2020 Film Independent Spirit Awards in Santa Monica, California.—AFP

Nicolas Cage to star in 'Tiger King' series

Nicolas Cage will star in a scripted television series about flamboyant "Tiger King" zookeeper Joe Exotic, his publicist told AFP Monday. The Oscar-winning US actor will also executive produce the show based on a magazine article about Exotic, who recently shot to fame as the subject of a wildly popular docuseries. The surreal story of Exotic — a gay, mullet-wearing private zoo owner now in prison for murder-for-hire — became a US cultural phenomenon following the release of a Netflix documentary. "Tiger King" was watched a reported 34 million times in just 10 days following its release in March, providing welcome relief to a nation under coronavirus lockdown.

Cage's series will be his first major foray into television, and is the second scripted show known to be in the works about Exotic, whose real name is Joseph Maldonado-Passage. According to Variety, the eight-episode series will be created by CBS and Imagine's Brian Grazer, Oscar-winning producer of "A Beautiful Mind." It will "explore how he became Joe Exotic, and how he lost himself to a character of his own creation," the Hollywood trade publication said. Another television series based on a podcast about Exotic is also in development. Cage, who won the best actor Oscar for "Leaving Las Vegas" (1995), enjoys a cult following and has starred in wide range of box office hits including "Face/Off," "Con Air" and "National Treasure."—AFP



In this file photo New Zealand director-actor Taika Waititi poses with his award for Best Adapted Screenplay for "Jojo Rabbit".—AFP

Waititi to direct new 'Star Wars' film

New Zealand filmmaker Taika Waititi will write and direct a new "Star Wars" film, Disney announced Monday. Waititi has shot from indie acclaim to mainstream Hollywood success in recent years, overseeing Marvel superhero smash hit "Thor: Ragnarok" in 2017 before winning a screenplay Oscar for Nazi satire "Jojo Rabbit" in February. He also directed the first season finale of "The Mandalorian," the hit television show set in the blockbuster sci-fi franchise universe. No date was set for the new movie. But the first of three currently scheduled "Star Wars" on Disney's release calendar is penciled in for December 2022.

Announcing the news on May 4 — a date typically celebrated by "Star Wars" fans around the world who wish each other "May the 4th be with you" — Disney also confirmed reports that "Russian Doll" co-creator Leslye Headland will develop a new television series set in the same universe. "Headland will write, executive produce, and serve as showrunner for the series, which adds to a growing list of 'Star Wars' stories for Disney's streaming platform including "The Mandalorian," now in post-production on Season Two," said the announcement on StarWars.com.—AFP

Woody Allen's controversial memoirs to appear in French

Woody Allen's controversial autobiography "Apropos of Nothing" will finally be published in French in June after the first US edition was pulled and then pulped. His French publisher Stock jumped to the veteran filmmaker's defence in March when Hachette staff in New York walked out when they learned that the company was printing his memoirs. Allen has been dogged by persistent allegations that he sexually abused his adopted daughter Dylan Farrow when she was a child — claims he denies. Her journalist brother Ronan Farrow said he would no longer work with Hachette — which published his bestseller "Catch and Kill" — before the books giant

decided not to release the memoir.

But Stock's chief executive Manuel Carcassonne said Allen — whose films are still popular in France — was "not Roman Polanski", a reference to the filmmaker accused of raping a number of women. He said Allen "had been cleared twice" by the courts of abuse and "there was no moral or legal obstacle to publishing and supporting him", Carcassonne told French media. A smaller US imprint, Arcade, picked up the rights to Allen's book and it has since become an Amazon bestseller. Stock had been due to release the book in France on April 29, but with bookshops shut by the coronavirus lockdown, said it would now

appear on June 3. The book has also been published in Spanish and Italian. Critical reaction to the memoir has been mixed, particularly in English.

The New York Times damned it with faint praise, saying it is "sometimes funny and tone deaf and banal", while The Guardian said it enjoyed his self-deprecating wit but that the "spiteful tone" in which Allen talks of his marriage to Mia Farrow "helps no one". Allen settled a \$68 million (62 million euro) lawsuit against Amazon Studios in November after it scrapped a four-film deal with the 84-year-old for his comments on the #MeToo movement.—AFP



Woody Allen

Jazz musician plays gigs from DC house — mid-renovation

Jazz harmonica player Frederic Yonnet was gearing up for a tour of the United States. But when the coronavirus shattered his plans for live national performances, he pivoted to something more local. Every Sunday, in a half-remodeled house and surrounded by plastic to maintain social distancing, Yonnet and his four-piece band entertain residents and onlookers strolling through Washington's colorful Capitol Hill neighborhood, just a few blocks from the Capitol building itself. "When the confinement was declared, I felt like I was in a hamster wheel," Yonnet, 47, told AFP. His need to keep playing led him to set up musical equipment in a house he is renovating.

The harmonica player was born in Normandy, France but has lived in the US for the past 20 years. He has played with legends such as Prince and Stevie Wonder and even lent his harmonica to the sound-

track of Martin Scorsese's "The Irishman." "At first, we wanted to play just for ourselves, which was very selfish," he said. But the band decided to open up the performances to the neighborhood. Yonnet dropped notes in his neighbors' mailboxes in case the noise bothered them. The response was so positive that he began performing online as well. Now, every Sunday, Yonnet streams live on his Instagram and Facebook accounts.

'This, too, will pass'

Capitol Hill residents have begun sitting on their front porches to enjoy Yonnet's music. Other listeners drive over from elsewhere in Washington, sitting in their cars for the duration of the concert. One such visitor is Robert Young, who said Yonnet's music is a way to relieve stress and feel good energy at a time

when the coronavirus has claimed nearly 70,000 lives in the US — far more than any other country. "At least we know that humanity is still here, we are still doing art and creativity to uplift people," Yonnet said.

Wanda Evens, seated at the wheel of her car, agreed: "This reminds me that this, too, will pass," she said, sporting a black mask with the phrase "Social Distancing" written on it. "We're all linked by this virus. It puts us all on the same plane," Yonnet said. In the musician's opinion, the virus has created a dark, gloomy atmosphere binding everyone together. But music can have a "healing" effect. "Music is a universal language that everyone can understand," he said. "It's the opposite of the virus."—AFP



Jazz harmonica player Frederic Yonnet (center) does a "social distancing" sound check, separated by plastic tarp from band members (from left) Robbie McDonald on the guitar, Dennis Turner on the bass, Christopher Bynum at the drums and Warren Jones on the keyboard with soundman Eric Harris, in Washington, DC on Sunday before live streaming the concert on his Instagram and Facebook accounts.—AFP photos



The diatonic harmonicas of jazz harmonica player Frederic Yonnet are seen laid out on a rack during a "social distancing" sound check.



(From left) Robbie McDonald on the guitar, Dennis Turner on the bass and Christopher Bynum at the drums take part in a "social distancing" sound check.



Jazz harmonica player Frederic Yonnet (center) does a "social distancing" sound check, separated by plastic tarp from band members (background).



Jazz harmonica player Frederic Yonnet (left) does a "social distancing" sound check with soundman Eric Harris.

Lifestyle | Features



A hairdresser cuts a customer's hair during the first day of reopening in Berlin amid the novel coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic.—AFP photos

'I looked like Robinson Crusoe': Relief as salons reopen in Germany

Helmut Wichter had been desperate for a haircut for weeks as hair salons were shut in Germany to slow the spread of the coronavirus. "I looked like Robinson Crusoe," said the 87-year-old, who joined crowds flocking to salons early Monday as they reopened their doors. "I came here this morning and saw that there were already young people standing outside," Wichter told AFP, as he finally emerged clean shaven from a barber's shop in Berlin. Many Germans had been left lamenting the state of their hair since mid-March, with some resorting to the black market to meet their grooming needs.

In late April, police busted two illegal hairdressers in basements in the Bavarian district of Miltenberg. One in seven people also resorted to cutting their own locks during the period, according to a survey by YouGov commissioned by national news agency DPA. But Monday saw the start of a new phase of the virus fightback in Europe's biggest economy, with salons allowed to

open once again along with some schools, museums, zoos, churches and playgrounds. Hairdressers have also reopened in Iceland, Slovenia and Greece as many European countries tentatively begin to ease lockdown measures designed to contain the virus.

At another barber's shop a few streets away, Galep Atmaca, 15, started waiting outside at 8 am. "I feel uncomfortable with my hair right now," he said, a crop of dark curls sticking out from beneath his hoodie. In the southwestern town of Kehl, Kehret Herbert also decided to try his luck and show up at his local salon without an appointment. "It's already three weeks past the point where I needed to go to the hairdresser," he said, an unruly crop of grey hair sprouting from his temples.

'A bit scared'

With social distancing measures still in place, hairdressers and their customers are now required to wear face masks, and customers must be seated

at least 1.5 meters apart. Many places also allow only a couple of people inside at a time. For Daniela Dacic, a stylist at the Salon de Beaute in Kehl, wearing a mask is nothing out of the ordinary. "We wear masks anyway when we mix colors, because of the chemicals," she said at the salon, which is also offering manicures behind a plexiglass screen. Business is booming for barber Ramazan Uzun, 27, whose Cut 36 salon in Berlin's Kreuzberg district is nearly fully booked for the week. "People are keen to have a proper haircut," he said.

Despite the safety measures, Uzun is still concerned as he lives with his parents and is worried about them getting infected. "But we have to make a living somehow," he said. "If we get infected it's not a problem, but then when we go home and our kids and parents are at home, that does make you a bit scared."—AFP



Hairdresser Sarah Stemmer wears a protective mask as she styles a customer's hair in her salon in Puchheim near Munich.



In this file photo taken on May 7, 2018 Elon Musk and Grimes arrive for the 2018 Met Gala, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.—AFP

Musk and girlfriend welcome first child together

Elon Musk's girlfriend has given birth to the couple's first child together, the outspoken Tesla chief announced Monday. Musk, 48, has been dating the musician Grimes since 2018. When fans began asking the SpaceX CEO on Twitter for updates on his child, Musk replied that the birth was just "a few hours away!" Four hours later, Musk replied to his own tweet to announce, "Mom & baby all good." He has not released any further details about the child. This is Grimes' first child, while Musk already has five sons. He has been divorced three times — twice from the same woman.

Grimes, 32, whose real name is Claire Boucher, announced she was pregnant in January on Instagram. She

shared a topless photo of herself with a baby bump and wrote in the caption that "being knocked up is a very feral & war-like state of being." The couple made waves with their first public appearance together at the Met Gala in 2018, surprising both the music and business worlds. Grimes wore a choker shaped like the Tesla logo to further demonstrate their relationship status. Musk, known for his grand ambition and brash demeanor, had already been in the news the past week when he went on a Twitter rant that included saying Tesla's stock was overvalued. The comment sent shares of the electric carmaker tumbling.—AFP

Germany's Love Parade stampede trial ends without verdict

Germany's Love Parade stampede trial ended without a verdict Monday after judges found that coronavirus restrictions would make it impossible to conclude one of the nation's biggest post-war trials before the statute of limitations expired. Three people had been in the dock on charges of negligent manslaughter and causing bodily harm after the popular techno music festival ended in a catastrophic crush in 2010 that left 21 young people dead. But the long-running trial at the district court in western city of Duisburg where the disaster occurred was now officially closed, a court spokesman told AFP.

The case against seven others was already halted in February 2019 with the court arguing that, with so many defendants, the individual levels of guilt were difficult to assess. The decision to end the trial prematurely had been widely expected. Judges had warned last month that restrictions placed on legal proceedings to stem the coronavirus outbreak, such as social distancing and the need to isolate vulnerable people, meant there was only "a very low probability of clarifying the allegations in a way that would lead to a conviction". Delaying the trial would not help the

case as it risks hitting the statute of limitations on July 27.

Panic in narrow tunnel

Prosecutors and the three defendants had agreed with the court's plan to halt the trial. Survivors and relatives of the victims had voiced objections, but the judges did not require their consent to make the decision. Thirteen women and eight men were crushed, trampled to death or suffocated on July 24, 2010 when panic broke out in a narrow tunnel that served as the only entrance and exit to the Love Parade street festival. More than 650 people were also injured in the stampede that saw victims squashed against fences and walls.

The trial was one of the largest criminal cases Germany has ever seen, with the accused being represented by 32 lawyers while survivors and victims' relatives, acting as co-plaintiffs, have enlisted nearly 40 lawyers. The scale of the trial and the huge public interest initially forced court officials to move the proceedings to a convention hall in the nearby city of Duesseldorf that can seat 500 people.—AFP



Polish Chopin contest delayed until 2021 over virus

Poland's Chopin competition, which has launched the careers of renowned pianists, has been postponed until next year because of the coronavirus pandemic, organizers said Monday. The autumn competition that draws contestants from around the world once every five years will take place at the Warsaw Philharmonic from October 2 to 23 in 2021, organizers said on the official website. They added that the list of pianists already accepted for the preliminary round "will remain the same. All the tickets purchased for the sold-out event remain valid." A total of 164 pianists from more than 30 countries are to compete in the preliminary round in Warsaw, with 80 to be selected to perform in the subsequent round.

Since it began in 1927, the competition named after the composer Frederic Chopin has opened doors for the winners to play in prestigious venues and has launched the careers of celebrated pianists like the Italian Maurizio Pollini and Argentina's Martha Argerich. It is reserved for pianists between the ages of 16 and 30, and laureates have come from Asia, Europe, and North and South America.—AFP

LOVE DURING LOCKDOWN: SINGLES IN US REINVENT DATING

How do you find love when you're stuck at home? The coronavirus pandemic has made that challenging, to say the least. But millions of single Americans are finding ways. Some have attempted socially distanced outings, others have turned to steamy video chats, while still others have tried international online dating as people adapt the art of seduction to the virus era — and dating apps are finding ways to adjust. In normal times, Kate Earle, a 30-year-old teacher in Washington, finds it fairly easy to connect in person with men she finds attractive at first glance on Tinder. "But because that's not an option, the conversations are going on much longer," she said.

Earle said those conversations also seem to veer more often toward "online sexual interaction," but she added that she has never considered breaking lock-

down rules for an in-person date. "I think everybody is a little bit sexually frustrated, and I am as well," she said. "And there's definitely been temptation to meet up with somebody... but I think it's not so much that I would actually do it."

Masks off

The Great Lockdown has driven single people around the world to online dating apps in record numbers. Tinder saw an all-time high in usage on March 29, with more than three billion "swipes," and the number of messages exchanged on rival app Bumble increased 26 percent over a two-week period in March in the United States. The lockdown order came at the worst possible time for Beatrice, who was newly separated from her husband and living in the US capi-

tal. A 30-something Frenchwoman, she registered with several online dating apps in mid-March.

Since then, she has found herself bending some of the confinement rules to improvise outings with her new acquaintances. "I was a bit nervous," she told AFP. "It's hard walking with a mask on your face when you're meeting someone for the first time. So you end up taking off the mask after five minutes." After a few disappointing outings during which she observed physical separation rules, she met someone she liked — "and we ended up not respecting social distancing," she admitted.

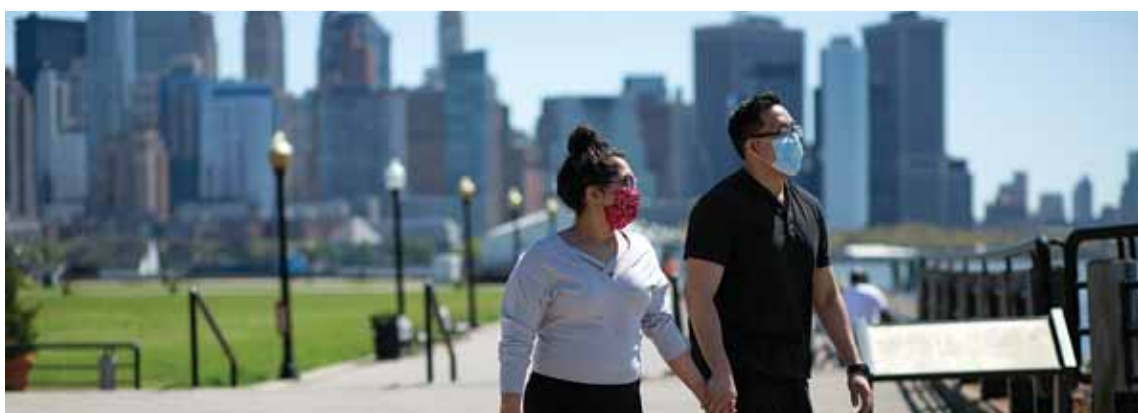
'The cherry on top'

In the new normal created by the virus crisis, video dating is fast becoming the norm. While Tinder lacks this option, both Hinge and Bumble offer virtual dating. Zach Schlein launched his Filter Off app for video speed-dating just before the pandemic struck, and at first only a few thousand users signed up. But that changed quickly. "It's like a 7,000 percent increase in less than a month," said the 29-year-old New Yorker, who believes online dating is the best way to assess possible romantic interest before meeting in person. "It's been nuts." So, can a romantic candlelight dinner with a stranger — on a laptop screen — really work? Dating coach Bela Gandhi cited the example of one client, a woman in her 60s, "who has fallen in love with somebody in the last six weeks, and they've only met via Skype." Gandhi, who founded the Smart Dating Academy website, says video can make it easy to develop "emotional intimacy." "And then it's just the



In this file photo a man wearing a facemask and gloves amid the coronavirus pandemic uses his cellphone in Burbank.

cherry on top of the sundae once you meet in person." But Alexandra Solomon, a clinical psychologist on the faculty of Northwestern University outside Chicago, doesn't see it quite that way. "Thank goodness we have video dating for now," she said, but added: "When we come out of this, I really want people to go back to meeting across the table over a glass of wine or a cup of tea and having that old-fashioned organic experience of each other." Meanwhile, for those interested in exploring possible matches abroad, Tinder is keeping its Passport feature free until Monday. After that, "matches will remain, so no one has to say goodbye to anyone new they've met," said a Tinder spokesman.—AFP



In this file photo a couple holds hands as they visit Liberty State Park in Jersey City, New Jersey.—AFP photos



A Palestinian youth swings a homemade sparkler firework during the holy month of Ramadan in Rafah refugee camp in the southern Gaza Strip on Monday. — AFP

WHO: No proof on Wuhan lab...

Continued from Page 1

It initially downplayed the seriousness of the outbreak to shield China - has repeatedly said the virus clearly appears to have originated naturally from an animal source. WHO expert Maria Van Kerkhove stressed during Monday's briefing that there were some 15,000 full genome sequences of the novel coronavirus available, and "from all of the evidence that we have seen... this virus is of natural origin."

While coronaviruses generally originate in bats, both Van Kerkhove and Ryan stressed the importance of discovering how the virus that causes COVID-19 crossed over to humans, and what animal served as an "intermediary host" along the way. "We need to understand more about that

natural origin, and particularly about intermediate hosts," Ryan said. It was important to know "so that we can put in place the right public health and animal-human interface policies that will prevent this happening again," he stressed.

The WHO said last week it wanted to be invited to take part in Chinese investigations into the animal origins of the pandemic, which in a matter of months has killed more than 250,000 people worldwide. "We have offered, as we do with every case in every country, assistance with carrying out those investigations," Ryan said Monday. "We can learn from Chinese scientists," he said.

But he warned that if questions about the virus's origin were "projected as aggressive investigation of wrongdoing, than I believe that's much more difficult to deal with. That is a political issue. "Science needs to be at the center," he said. "If we have a science-based investigation and a science-based enquiry as to what the origin species and the intermediate species are, then that will benefit everybody on the planet." — AFP

Repatriation of Indians in Kuwait...

Continued from Page 1

grounds, a press release issued by the Indian government said.

According to the detailed flight plan prepared by the government, the second flight from Kuwait will be on May 9 to Kochi and the third on May 10 to Chennai. On the sixth day of evacuations, passengers will be taken home to Ahmedabad, while on the seventh day, a special flight will leave Kuwait for Calicut. Around 200 passengers will be carried on each flight, taking home around 1,000 people in the first phase of evacuations.

The evacuation, probably one of the largest in recent history, will cover countries such as the US, the UK, Bangladesh, Singapore, Malaysia, Bangladesh and Philippines, in addition to all the GCC countries, in the first phase. The government will deploy special flights and naval ships to carry out the mammoth exercise of bringing home thousands of people from these countries and the lists of evacuees are being prepared on a priority basis in consultations with Indian high commissions and embassies overseas.

Pregnant women, senior citizens, people affected with serious diseases other than COVID-19, people whose visas have expired, those who went abroad on visit visas and got stuck and people who are facing various hardships will be given priority. It is also expected that people who availed an amnesty offered by the Kuwait government will be able to go home now as the Indian government has decided to open its airspace to foreign carriers as part of the evacuation plan.

"Kuwait has offered free flights and air tickets for those who availed the amnesty. So, we expect that their repatriation will also take place simultaneously along with the evacuation. It is also our priority to evacuate those who are in deportation centers, numbering over 200. We want to give equal importance to deportees, serious medical cases and to those who were granted amnesty," an Indian Embassy official said.

The Indian Embassy has opened an e-registration platform, where people can fill the form and register: <http://indembkwt.com/eva/>. Around 30,000 people have registered with the embassy as of yesterday. Although the government will arrange the means of air passage, the evacuee will have to bear the travel fare, creating consternation among Indian community members in Kuwait.

"Some of them (evacuees) are financially very weak. Many of them are seriously ill, while others have lost their jobs. It is not fair on the part of the Indian government to charge the travel fare from all of them. The government must consider some cases at least on a merit basis, said Ajithkumar, Director of Kerala Pravasi Welfare Board.

Varghese Puthukulangara, President of Overseas Indian Cultural Congress (OICC) Kuwait, called upon the India government and various state governments to share the burden of the airfare of the

hapless evacuees. According to him, the welfare fund kept with the Indian embassy can be used for this purpose as well. "People like housemaids, taxi drivers, daily wage earners, etc are not in a position to buy their air tickets, paying more than KD 200. Such people need some humanitarian consideration," he pointed out.

India has embarked on a "massive" operation involving naval ships and aircraft to bring back some of the hundreds of thousands of nationals stuck abroad due to coronavirus restrictions, the government said. India banned all incoming international flights in late March as it imposed one of the world's strictest virus lockdowns, leaving vast numbers of workers and students stranded.

A defense spokesman told AFP yesterday that two ships were steaming towards the Maldives and another to the United Arab Emirates - home to a 3.3-million-strong Indian community, who make up around 30 percent of the Gulf state's population. A government statement said the evacuations would begin on Thursday and that Indian embassies and high commissions were preparing lists of "distressed Indian citizens".

Evacuees will have to pay for their passage the statement said, without elaborating, and spend 14 days in quarantine on arrival. "COVID test would be done after 14 days and further action will be taken according to health protocols," it added. India, the world's second-most populous nation with 1.3 billion people, yesterday reported 46,433 cases of the infectious disease and 1,568 deaths. It was the biggest single-day jump with 3,900 new infections and 195 deaths in the last 24 hours.

The consulate in Dubai said that it alone had almost 200,000 applications, appealing on Twitter for "patience and cooperation" as India undertakes the "massive task" of repatriation. The oil-rich Gulf is reliant on the cheap labor of millions of foreigners - mostly from India, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka - many of whom live in squalid camps far from the region's showy skyscrapers and malls. But coronavirus and the devastating economic impact of the pandemic has left many workers sick and others unemployed, unpaid and at the mercy of sometimes unscrupulous employers.

So far some 20,000 Indians in the US have signed up for the evacuations, The Times of India reported. But some Indians said they would not be able to pay for their evacuations and pleaded with the government for help. "I request government to take all of us at no charge during this crisis situation as we are all struggling here due to prolonged lockdown," tourist Sadhana Srivastava tweeted from Dubai. "I'm homeless now after I lost my job in March, please take me to India or else I will be in a big trouble here in Dubai, please help me sir," Saroj K Swain wrote on Twitter.

The UAE has been the most vocal among Gulf countries in demanding governments take workers back, with almost 23,000 having left as of April 20. But New Delhi had until now refused to cooperate, balking at the logistical and safety nightmare of repatriating and quarantining millions of returning citizens. India had earlier evacuated some 2,500 Indians from China, Japan, Iran and Italy before banning international and domestic travel.

Virus deaths top 250,000; billions...

Continued from Page 1

top US epidemiologist and government adviser Anthony Fauci. "Everything about the stepwise evolution over time strongly indicates that (this virus) evolved in nature and then jumped species," he said.

US President Donald Trump has acknowledged that deaths will go beyond his earlier prediction of 60,000, saying: "We're going to lose anywhere from 75, 80 to 100,000 people." His estimate underscored the tough, politically-tinged debate over reopening, which pits concerns about a rising death toll against the need to restore national economies shattered by prolonged shutdowns.

On Monday US manufacturing giant General Electric announced it will cut an additional 10,000 jobs from its aviation sector as the pandemic decimates the industry. The economic fallout in America prompted the US Treasury to announce it will borrow a record \$3 trillion in the April-June period, largely to finance spending on virus relief programs. In Australia officials said the economy is losing Aus\$4 billion (US\$2.5 billion) every week the nation's virus shutdown continues, with GDP forecast to plunge 10 percent in the June quarter.

People across Europe basked in a return to the outdoors, mixed with a dose of trepidation about life ahead and the economic damage wreaked by lockdowns. Workers banged away at construction sites in Rome, police handed out masks in Madrid and older children returned to school in Vienna. "We are all afraid," said a masked Cristina Jimenez,

31, in Madrid. "Who hasn't lost their job already may lose it in the next few months," she added. "But what is important is that we are well. With work, you can always find another."

Spain and Portugal made face masks mandatory on public transport as they further eased their lockdowns, while Slovenia, Poland and Hungary allowed public spaces and businesses to partially reopen. Africa's biggest city, Lagos, got back to work at the end of a five-week virus shutdown, while in India police waded in to separate people jostling to buy alcohol for the first time in 40 days as the world's biggest lockdown eased.

New Delhi said it had also embarked on a "massive" operation involving naval ships and aircraft to bring back some of the hundreds of thousands of Indian nationals stuck in the Maldives and United Arab Emirates due to coronavirus restrictions. Hong Kong meanwhile announced plans to ease major social distancing measures, including by reopening schools, cinemas, bars and beauty parlors after the Chinese territory largely halted local transmission of the virus.

And in a ray of hope for the sports world, South Korea's baseball players returned to action Tuesday in a new season, albeit to empty stadiums. Friday will also see the delayed start of the country's football K-League, and next week some of golf's leading women players will tee up in a domestic tournament as South Korea becomes a rare hotspot for live sport.

Culture of a different kind was providing a balm for people in Washington, where French harmonica player Frederic Yonnet is putting on regular two-hour concerts for free for people gathering outside his home in the US capital. Wanda Evans, basking in the music from her car, said: "There's still art, there's still talent, there's still beauty to be shared in this world." — AFP

Kuwait reports record 526...

Continued from Page 1

keep their jobs and companies to keep their employees. He said his amendment stipulates to legalize the salary cut only if the companies and their staff reach an agreement to this effect.

EQUATE trade union categorically rejected the government move, saying this will allow employers to dictate terms and force the cuts. It said this will result in forcing Kuwaitis in the private sector to leave and will greatly reduce job security. The Kuwait Progressive Movement said the government amendment "represents a new capitalist attack on the basic rights of workers", adding that this will give employers the upper hand over their employees in a clear violation of the labor law.

A number of private sector companies, including big ones, have already sacked some of their employees, reduced the salaries of others and forced the rest to take unpaid leave or take their annual leaves early.

National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem said yesterday that the Assembly will hold a session on May 12 to discuss a number of urgent issues related to the coronavirus pandemic. Ghanem said two hours of the session will be allocated for lawmakers to make comments on the government's handling of the coronavirus, including economic and health issues. The speaker said the Assembly will also listen to an explanation by the government on the fiscal status of the country, especially in wake of the coronavirus' economic impacts. The session will also review a number of draft laws related to the coronavirus.

Ghanem commended the action of the interior ministry to restore order following riots by Egyptian workers housed at special shelters over the Egyptian government's refusal to take them back. The speaker however said that such riots originated because of visa traders and called on the government to continue its crackdown on them.

Spokesman of the government Tareq Al-Mizrem said after the Cabinet meeting that the interior minister briefed the council about the riots and the ministry's actions. Mizrem said that the workers protested because their governments refused to repatriate them and not against any shortcomings at the shelters, as Kuwaiti authorities have provid-

ed them with all necessities.

Egyptian authorities and the embassy in Kuwait said that repatriation flights will start this week, probably on Tuesday or Wednesday, to repatriate close to 6,000 Egyptian workers who were living illegally in Kuwait and benefited from an amnesty by the interior ministry. Under the amnesty, violators did not pay fines or airfare.

Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Dr Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah announced Monday Kuwait's donation of \$40 million to the World Health Organization's coronavirus response plan. Kuwait now has donated a total of \$100 million to the global efforts to stop the spread of the virus and address its repercussions, said Sheikh Ahmad during a virtual summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, where he represented HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and headed Kuwait's delegation.

He vowed that Kuwait will continue its backing to the WHO and other international partners to counter the pandemic. The NAM virtual summit was held under the title "United against COVID-19" and was chaired by Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev. In addition to heads of state and government, the online meeting was also attended by representatives of international organizations such as United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and Director-General of WHO Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

The Kuwaiti top diplomat underscored the need for international synergy to defeat the rapidly spreading virus. The only way out from this crisis and to achieve tangible progress is working hand in hand, he argued. Sheikh Ahmad noted that Kuwait considers this epidemic as a very serious international health crisis. Thus, Kuwait intensified contacts with WHO, other relevant international organizations and friendly and sisterly countries from the first days of the outbreak to enhance cooperation and consolidate multilateral action to fight this epidemic, he said.

Sheikh Ahmad urged NAM member states to closely coordinate and cooperate in their anti-coronavirus efforts to protect their peoples and help mitigate the expected grave impacts on their economies. In this regard, he underlined the need for transparency, credibility and sharing all COVID-19 related information.

Sheikh Ahmad, however, cautioned against premature easing of anti-coronavirus measures as it could have grave consequences on peoples' health and countries' economies. The NAM represents the biggest grouping of countries outside the United Nations, comprising 120 developing countries from Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Stars

Daily SuDoku

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

hard

Yesterday's Solution

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

very hard

STAR TRACK

Aries (March 21-April 19)

You may feel indecisive, insecure, and stuck in the middle of a difficult situation, Aries. Your energy could be drawn in one direction while your self-confidence is pulled in another. This dilemma has to do with your inability to integrate different aspects of your life that you try to keep separate. Try to look at things in terms of the whole.

Libra (September 23-October 22)

Your indecisiveness may plague you, Libra. This is one of those times when you feel as if one second of hesitation will cost you dearly. Yet you take a while to process and internalize things before you're ready to act on them. Others may act and speak before they think. Don't get upset at yourself for handling things the way you do.

Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Communication with others should be very effective, Taurus, and your social calendar will be full. You're feeling good about yourself, thanks to a boost in confidence that reminds you that you can do anything. You can juggle many things at once and the physical endurance to keep up a quick pace.

Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

You're now in a terrific position to make a significant move in your life, Scorpio. With a great deal of physical energy coupled with incredibly high self-esteem, you have what it takes to make a major push toward larger goals. Opportunities are coming at you from all angles, and the energy at hand is fast and furious. Your strong, courageous nature is ripe for hopping aboard when that train comes zooming by.

Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Relating to people may be difficult for you since you get the feeling that others don't see things as deeply or emotionally as you, Gemini. Perhaps you feel everyone is shallow, making them luckier in one sense yet deprived in another. Try not to focus on others so much. Just concentrate on you. Don't take yourself so seriously. Adopt a more lighthearted approach to life.

Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

You might feel as if you can't access your physical energy now, Sagittarius. You may experience frustration when you try to engage in an exercise routine. You don't feel as if things are clicking into place as easily as they should. This feeling is taking a toll on your sense of self. Don't get down on yourself for feeling this way.

Cancer (June 21-July 22)

You have a great deal of physical energy, Cancer. At times, you may feel as if you have an endless wellspring of power. You're at a climactic point in your yearly cycle when things are coming to a dramatic apex. Difficulties that pertain to this climax are likely to make you act out aggressively if things don't go your way. Find a constructive outlet for all this physical energy.

Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Your physical vitality should be quite strong, Capricorn, and you're encouraged by greater self-confidence. At the same time, however, someone seems to be trying to ruffle your feathers by being selfish and disrespectful of your space. This is likely to lead to conflict that you don't need.

Leo (July 23-August 22)

Finding the comfort point may be difficult for you, Leo. You might feel as if you aren't connecting with your ideals or goals. Even though you try to put things into motion, they don't really pan out the way you'd like. There's difficult energy making you feel like you need to join one camp or the other to feel accepted. The problem is that neither side looks appealing.

Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

Things could be moving more quickly than makes you comfortable right now, Aquarius. You may feel as if your own needs and agenda are getting swept away in the current. You may as well go with the flow, as fighting against it will prove futile and exhausting. It's crucial to be adaptable and roll with the punches rather than feeling victimized by them. Use the lightning-quick energy of the situation at hand to focus your efforts.

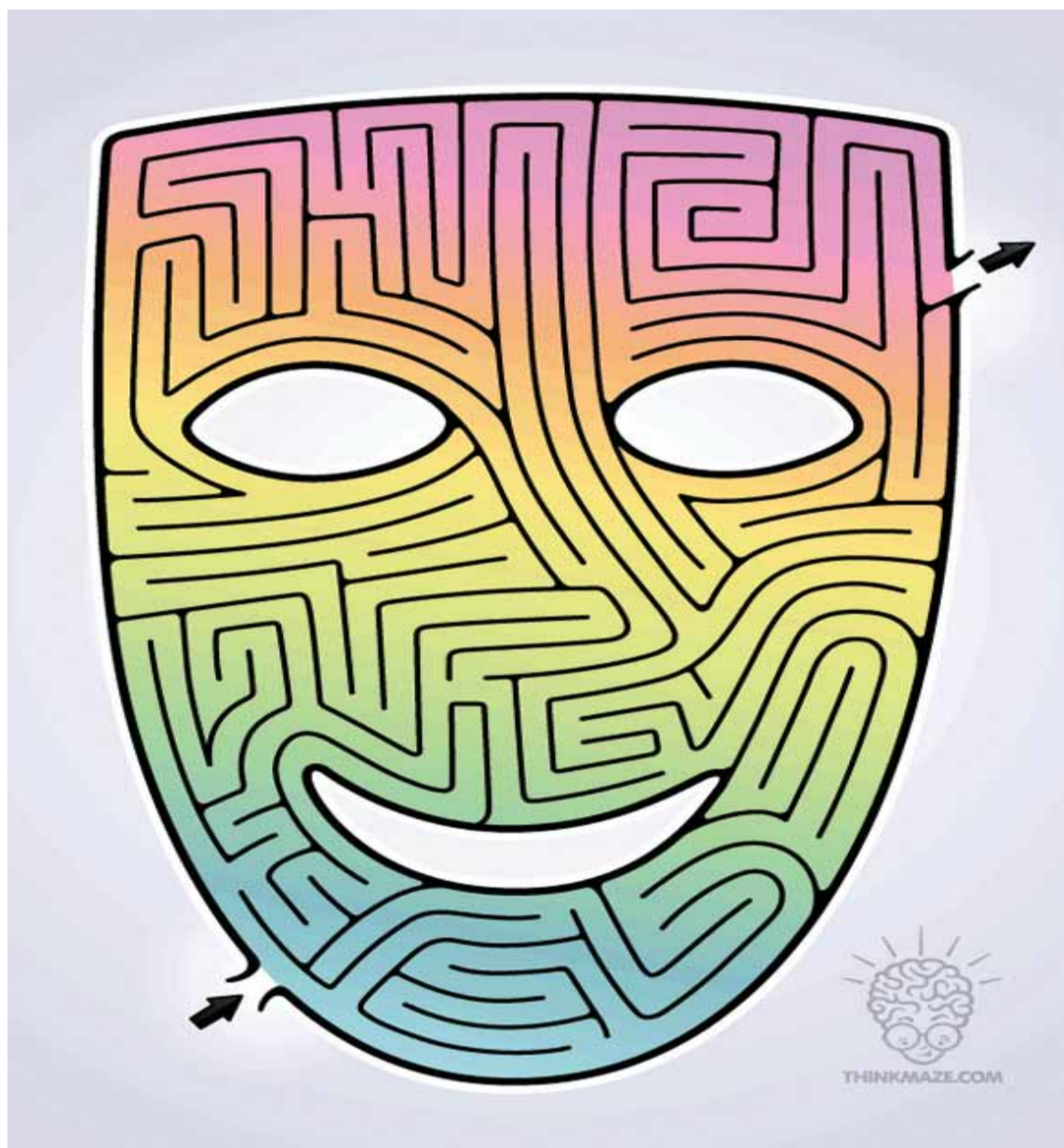
Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Your upbeat, lively nature is fueled by the fast-paced energy at hand. You have a great deal of physical strength available to you, Virgo, and you can make tremendous strides in your yearly goals with very minimal effort. Take advantage of this time by focusing on your own needs. There is a great deal of support in place that will help you accomplish whatever your goals may be. Go for it.

Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Your physical strength is topnotch, Pisces. Now is a terrific time to either start a home work out routine or take a pre-existing one to the next level. Others will respect your leadership abilities. Your glow as a self-confident, constructive being is radiating positive energy. This combination of forces is extremely powerful. You have the opportunity to be wonderfully productive at this time.


Find the way



Join the dots



Crossword



Lucille Ball
1911 - 1989

"Once in his life, every man is entitled to fall madly in love with a gorgeous redhead."

DIRECTIONS:
Find and circle the vocabulary words in the grid. Look for them in all directions including backwards and diagonally.

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

Actress
Ball
Comedian
Crystal Award
Desi Arnaz
Desilu Productions
Desiree
Eloped
Emmy Awards
Ethel

Fred
Gary Morton
Glamorous
Golden Globe
Hall of fame
Here's Lucy
Hilarious
I Love Lucy
Icon
Jamestown

Life with Lucy
Lucille
Model
New York
Producer
Series
Sitcom
Television
The Lucy Show
Vivian Vance

Sports

Photo of the day



DOHA: Nasser Al-Attyiah races at the Qatar Cross Country Rally in Doha, Qatar. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

Mellroy, Johnson to feature in charity match

MIAMI: Rory Mellroy and Dustin Johnson will face off against Rickie Fowler and Matthew Wolff in a skins match to raise money for the coronavirus relief effort, organisers announced on Monday.

The TaylorMade Driving Relief event will take place on May 17 at Seminole Golf Club in Juno Beach, Florida, a joint statement said.

The PGA Tour, NBC Sports and Britain's Sky Sports will televise the match, which will raise funds for the American Nurses Foundation and CDC Foundation, two organisations helping to lead COVID-19 relief efforts.

No spectators will be allowed to access the event, which will follow strict social distancing guidelines as laid down by the US Centers for Disease Control.

A statement said "appropriate testing measures" would be put in place to protect the health of players, production crew and others on site.

Organisers said the match would be the first televised golf event since the COVID-19 pandemic brought sport around the world to a standstill in March.

"We are excited about the safe and responsible return of live golf and the opportunity to raise significant funds for those on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic through the TaylorMade Driving Relief event," said PGA TOUR Commissioner Jay Monahan.

"Golf fans around the world can look forward to a unique, interactive and entertaining event that will help those in need."

The golfing calendar has been thrown into disarray since the coronavirus crisis erupted, with the PGA Tour and LPGA Tour suspended and several golf majors either postponed or cancelled.

The US PGA Tour last month said it planned to resume in June, with the first four events due to take place without spectators. —AFP

Virus could end Paralympic dream for British badminton player

'The kitchen is my gym'

LONDON: Multiple sclerosis sufferer Mary Wilson fears the coronavirus pandemic could have robbed her of her dream to play badminton at the Paralympics.

Wilson, who hoped to qualify for Tokyo 2020, says if she does make it to Japan next year it will "be the biggest thing ever" but she recognises time may not be on her side.

The 56-year-old Scot has faced — and overcome — some astonishing challenges since being diagnosed with MS, a chronic neurological condition, in 2004.

She survived an attack during a military tour of duty in Afghanistan, an ugly incident involving a Ugandan policeman, and has climbed every one of the Munros, the 282 mountains in Scotland over 3,000 feet (914 metres) high.

But Wilson's Paralympic hopes are on hold after Olympics and Paralympics organisers bowed to the inevitable at the end of March, delaying both events until next year and meaning badminton could not make its Paralympic debut in 2020.

Wilson agreed with the decision but admits it is a huge blow for her personally as she has secondary progressive MS.

"It is definitely going to affect my chances with an extra year," Wilson told AFP by phone from the Edinburgh home she shares with partner Judi and their German Shepherd dog Max.

"A year is a long time trying to train hard. I feel my body is going backwards. It (the MS) is affecting it."

"To tell you the truth I think it should have been called off sooner," she said. "It dragged on a bit (the official announcement was made on March 24). People in other countries were dying."

Wilson was in Spain for a competition when that

country went into lockdown due to COVID-19. "I went out walking and a police car went past and stopped," she said.

"The policeman threatened to handcuff me and take me to the station as I shouldn't have been out walking although I was unaware that was the case."

"They followed me back to the hotel to make sure I was going there."

Wilson managed to find a seat on a flight back to Scotland and is now following a radically adapted training regime at home.

"I set up a programme each day, strength and conditioning from press-ups to sit-ups, lunges, calf raises," said the athlete, who has to take extra care during the coronavirus lockdown due to her condition.

"The kitchen is my gym. I do press-ups off the kitchen surface but I wear kitchen gloves as the surfaces are really sharp."

Wilson said para-badminton was an expensive sport — competitors need adapted equipment and transport — and many of her rivals struggle to fund themselves.

She estimates she has spent £50,000 (\$62,000) since she began competing internationally in 2017.

Aside from some funding from the charity Path To Success, she has had to dip into her Army pension and a legacy left to her by her late father.

Path to success

BATTLE-SCARRED

She is fortunate to be even contemplating appearing at Tokyo after an Afghan truck driver tried to run her over at Camp Bastion, the former British Army airbase in Helmand Province, in 2008.

The psychiatric nurse, who served with Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps, had to leave her tent one evening.

"There were no lights in case we got



EDINBURGH: British Paralympic badminton player Mary Wilson trains at her home in Edinburgh, Scotland during the coronavirus lockdown on May 1, 2020. —AFP

mortared," she said.

"I heard this vehicle behind me. He had a dimmed light on and he was driving faster and faster and tried to run me over. I managed to dive off the road."

Wilson woke up after an operation to find a neighbouring bed was occupied by a wounded Taliban fighter.

"We stared at each other both in shock," she said. "I said to myself 'I must not show my emotions'."

The former staff sergeant said her army training served her well when in 2018, on her way to Kampala airport after a tournament, she was forced off the

hotel bus at gunpoint by a Ugandan policeman.

He had a taxi driver take them to a secluded spot and demanded \$1,000 or else a trip to a police station.

"My army training kicked in there," she said. "I was very calm, I did not scream or shout."

"I came to an agreement with him, gave him some money and managed, unbeknownst to him, to take a photo of him."

"When I returned home I notified the authorities and he was arrested and jailed. At least he got his comeuppance." —AFP

Sun appeals against doping ban: Report

LAUSANNE: Disgraced Chinese swimming star Sun Yang has lodged an appeal against his eight-year doping ban with the Swiss Federal Tribunal (SFT), according to a report which has been confirmed to AFP by a source close to the case.

Sun, who also served a three-month doping suspension in 2014, was found guilty of refusing to give a doping sample and banned for eight years by the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) in February, upholding an appeal by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) against swimming's governing body FINA.

All decisions made by CAS can be appealed to the SFT. Unless he is successful with the appeal, Sun will not be

eligible for the Tokyo Games in 2021 and his career would be effectively over. The SFT did not confirm the information, but according to the report, "a case file has been opened with a number attached to the 'Sun Yang Case'".

Sun remains suspended from competition during the appeal. Magazine Swimming World reported on Monday that Sun's lawyers had filed the appeal with a day to spare on April 29.

The three-time Olympic champion has previously seen two appeals rejected by the SFT before the CAS decision. A vial of Sun's own blood sample was smashed with a hammer during a testing session in 2018, but the swimmer was acquitted by FINA of anti-doping violations, agreeing that testers had failed to produce adequate identification.

But the ruling outraged WADA which took the matter to CAS, demanding a ban of between two and eight years for missing the out-of-competition test.

The Chinese Swimming Association (CSA) said after CAS announced Sun's

ban that it supported the 28-year-old and encouraged Sun to "continue to safeguard his legitimate rights".

Sun has been widely criticised by other swimmers, with some rivals refusing to share a podium with him during the 2019 world championships. Last month, WADA demanded answers after Sun was called up for national training for the Tokyo Olympics in an apparent breach of his ban.

The CSA said the notice naming Sun for the training was "invalid". Sun has kept a low profile since he was banned. The medals he won at last year's world championships, including two golds, remain on his list of honours after CAS said it could not retrospectively strip him of titles.

A lawyer for Sun said in February he would appeal. "February 28, 2020 was a dark day. It shows the scene where evil defeats justice and power replaces self-evident truths," Beijing lawyer Zhang Qihui said in a statement the day after CAS announced the swimmer's ban. —AFP

Badminton restart 'difficult to predict'

HONG KONG: Badminton will be back in action "as soon as possible" after the coronavirus crisis, the sport's chief told AFP, adding that international travel restrictions were complicating the picture.

Badminton, like tennis, golf and other sports with an international circuit, faces major hurdles after countries introduced an array of travel bans and quarantine periods to combat COVID-19.

Thomas Lund, secretary general of the Badminton World Federation, said an announcement on a rejigged 2020 calendar was expected soon. But he cautioned that the situation remained fluid.

"We are gearing up to be ready to start competition as soon as possible. This includes formulating a revamped BWF tournament calendar for 2020. An announcement on this

will be made shortly," Lund said in a statement to AFP.

"But at this point in time, it is difficult to predict when international movement and entry restrictions will be lifted by individual countries and territories in order to guarantee that players, their entourage, officials and staff can participate in tournaments safely."

Badminton has already moved the Thomas and Uber Cups, a highlight of the season, to later in the year, hoping that the virus emergency will have passed.

The de facto men's and women's world team championships — originally scheduled for May, and then moved to August — are now set to take place in Aarhus, Denmark in October.

The pinnacle of the badminton season had been expected to be the Tokyo Olympics, now shifted to 2021 because of the coronavirus pandemic.

All BWF tournaments have been suspended since mid-March, when most professional sports worldwide were frozen as travel restrictions bit and a swathe of countries went into lockdown. —AFP

Sports

German league hopes for restart go-ahead despite ten cases of virus

DFL insists mass testing of players and backroom staff

BERLIN: Germany's football league insisted Monday the mass testing of players and backroom staff was "providing protection" after 10 cases of coronavirus across the top two divisions raised questions about its plans to resume matches this month.

On Monday, the German Football League (DFL) reported that out of 1,724 tests, 10 had returned a positive result, three of which are already known to involve Bundesliga side Cologne.

"The tests carried out over the past few days have fulfilled their purpose of providing additional safety and thus protecting players as best as possible from infection during team training or matches," the DFL said in a statement.

The positive results, around 0.5 percent of the total, all came from the first batch of tests as the German league prepares to restart matches from the weekend of May 16 in empty stadiums and with strict hygiene measures.

The league's plans to become the first major European football competition to restart since the season was halted in mid-March hinge on the regular testing of players.

The DFL did not specify which clubs the positive tests came from, but the individuals concerned have immediately been quarantined and the local health authorities informed.

DECISION DUE WEDNESDAY

The news of the positive tests comes as the league is hoping to get the green light to resume from Chancellor Angela Merkel's federal government today. According to the regulations in force in Germany, anyone who has been in contact with a positive case of coronavirus must observe a 14-day

isolation period.

Horst Seehofer, Germany's interior minister who has responsibility for sport, has said he supports the plans for Bundesliga teams to finish its interrupted season. However, on Monday Seehofer's ministry football would not be allowed to deviate from the rules for the wider population.

"Horst Seehofer stands by what he said — anyone who has been in direct contact with a person who has tested positive must be quarantined for 14 days," interior ministry spokesman Steve Alter said.

"This is a principle that applies to the whole population and there is no reason why it should be any different for professional footballers." The league's plans to resume state that clubs are able to continue training even if a squad member or coach tests positive for the coronavirus and is quarantined. Germany's top clubs are desperate for the season to be completed by June 30 in order to claim a 300 million euros (\$325 million) instalment of money due from the league's television contract.

Thirteen of the 36 clubs in the top two leagues are reportedly under severe financial pressure due to the pandemic. Some politicians also want league games switched from pay-per-view broadcaster Sky to state channels to encourage fans to stay at home and not gather to watch matches in public places which have a subscription.

RB Leipzig, who were third in the table behind leaders Bayern Munich when the league halted, are planning to keep their squad in semi-quarantine on their training grounds should games resume.

They will "possibly spend the night here as well.



Salomon Kalou suspended



COLOGNE: (L-R) Cologne's German goalkeeper Thomas Kessler, Cologne's German defender Jonas Hector and Cologne's German coach Markus Gisdol make their way to the training ground for a session of the German first division football Bundesliga club 1 FC Cologne in Cologne, western Germany on May 4, 2020 amid the novel coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic. — AFP

This is still being discussed," Leipzig's German international defender Marcel Halstenberg told broadcaster MDR.

KALOU SUSPENDED

Not all players are following the strict hygiene measures. In a video he posted to Facebook on Monday, former Chelsea striker Salomon Kalou greeted Hertha Berlin team-mates and staff with handshakes, breaking guidelines to avoid contact and earning the league's wrath.

"The pictures of Salomon Kalou from the Hertha dressing room are absolutely unacceptable," the DFL said. Hertha said they have suspended Kalou,

who apologised for the incident, from training and playing "with immediate effect".

The German league is aware that its plans are under scrutiny. Anja Stahmann, chairwoman of Germany's state ministers for sport, called for "the greatest possible transparency" from the DFL.

She also added fuel to the debate about whether the league should resume. "In public, people are rightly saying - 'why should football resume behind locked doors yet religious services are still banned?'," the Bremen-based politician told Deutschlandfunk radio. "Why are the playgrounds closed, but millionaires are allowed to play football?" — AFP

Legendary Miami Dolphins coach Don Shula dead

MIAMI: Legendary Miami Dolphins coach Don Shula, who led the team to the only unbeaten Super Bowl-winning season in NFL history, died Monday. He was 90. A statement from the Miami Dolphins said Shula had passed away peacefully at his home.

"Don Shula was the patriarch of the Miami Dolphins for 50 years," the Dolphins said in a statement. "He brought the winning edge to our franchise and put the Dolphins and the city of Miami in the national sports scene," the team added.

Shula's career included two Super Bowl wins, a record 347 victories and the only unbeaten season in history when the Dolphins were a perfect 17-0 in 1972 en route to the title.

NFL commissioner Roger Goodell said Shula would be remembered as "one of the greatest coaches and contributors in the history of our game". "He made an extraordinarily positive impact on so many lives," Goodell said in a statement.

"The winningest coach in NFL history and the only one to lead a team to a perfect season. Coach Shula lived an unparalleled football life." Shula's heyday came in the early 1970s. Taking over a fledgling Miami side in 1970, he transformed them into a dynasty, reaching three consecutive Super

Bowls in 1971, 1972 and 1973.

That hat-trick of appearances included back-to-back Super Bowl wins in 1972 and 1973. But it was the achievements of his invincible 1972 side that helped elevate Shula to the NFL pantheon.

'BEST COACH IN HEAVEN'

Shula however would later say that his record of 347 wins — more than other coach in NFL history — was his greatest source of pride. Legendary Chicago Bears coach George Halas is second in the all-time standings with 324 wins while New England coach Bill Belichick is on 304.

"The 347 wins is the thing I'm most proud of," Shula said in a 2013 interview. "Nobody's even close to it." Belichick led NFL-wide tributes for Shula on Monday. "Don Shula is one of the all-time great coaching figures and the standard for consistency and leadership in the NFL," Belichick said in a statement.

"I extend my deepest condolences to the Shula family and the Dolphins organization." Meanwhile, quarterback Dan Marino, who played under Shula for more than 10 seasons, wrote on Twitter that the Dolphins coach embodied "the definition of greatness".

"You brought that winning attitude



MIAMI: File photo shows former Miami Dolphins head coach Don Shula (R) cheers towards the Miami fans with wife Maryann (L) during a pre-game ceremony where Shula received his Hall of Fame ring 17 November at Pro Player Stadium in Miami, Florida. —AFP

with you every day and made everyone around you better," Marino wrote. "Thank you for always believing in me. You made me a better player and person...love you coach."

Marino's former Dolphins teammate and wide receiver Mark Clayton mourned the passing of the "greatest coach in NFL history".

"Coach Shula took a chance on me and the rest is history," Clayton wrote. "My condolences to the family. Best coach on earth, best coach in heaven."

Tampa Bay Buccaneers coach Bruce Arians wrote simply: "We lost the greatest coach of all time. RIP Coach Don Shula." Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones meanwhile said Shula had a presence which extended beyond the NFL.

"Don was not just an iconic figure in the history of our game, he was an American institution who always represented the highest levels of character, leadership and integrity," Jones said in a statement. —AFP

Evra reveals death threats

LONDON: Former Manchester United defender Patrice Evra has said he received death threats following a racism row involving then-Liverpool forward Luis Suarez in 2011. Uruguay striker Suarez was banned for eight matches by the English Football Association after being found guilty of misconduct for insulting comments to Evra, which included a reference to the left-back's skin colour, at Anfield in October that year.

Liverpool, however, mounted a prolonged and public defence of Suarez's conduct as the row between the rival clubs escalated. Evra said one consequence of the backlash included letters threatening the Frenchman and his family. "Manchester United received so many threatening letters about me," Evra told the club's UTD podcast. "People said: 'We're in jail, we're Liverpool fans. When we get out, we're going to kill you and your family'."

Evra said the nature of the threats meant he had to be protected by bodyguards. "For two months, I had security everywhere I went. They were sleeping in front of my house. Everywhere I went, the security followed me. "It was a tough time, but I wasn't scared. My family were scared: my wife and brother, but I wasn't. "I couldn't understand why people hated me so much. They didn't know the truth." Evra, who saw his attempt to shake hands with Suarez before a match the following February rebuffed by the striker, said he had forgiven his old antagonist and even spoke to the now Barcelona star before the 2015 Champions League final when playing for Juventus. — AFP

Spain's La Liga eyes June restart date

MADRID: La Liga announced on Monday it planned to restart the Spanish league campaign in June after more than two months without games due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Individual training will begin for players this week after the country's government lifted sport-related measures. "People's health is paramount, so we have a comprehensive protocol to safeguard the health of everyone involved as we work to restart La Liga," league president Javier Tebas said in the statement. "Circumstances are unprecedented, but we hope to start playing again in June and finish our 19/20 season this summer," he added. From Tuesday, professional footballers in Spain will undergo tests for COVID-19 and will only be allowed to return to training once a negative result is produced.

A source told AFP Real Madrid are meeting on Monday to decide on their schedule and are planning to return to training this week. Capital city rivals Atletico Madrid expect to start tests on Wednesday with the campaign having been on hold since March 12 with 11 rounds to play.

In April, Tebas said the Spanish top-flight and second division could start on May 28-29, June 6-7 or June 28-29 and could be played behind closed doors. Spain's government continued to ease lockdown measures related to the illness on Monday which has claimed more than 25,400 lives according to official figures. According to La Liga figures professional football accounts for 1.37% of the country's GDP and creates 185,000 jobs. — AFP

Egyptian tennis player Hossam receives life ban

LONDON: Egyptian player Youssef Hossam has been banned from professional tennis for life for match-fixing, two years after his brother was also permanently excluded from the sport on corruption charges. A statement from the Tennis Integrity Unit issued Monday said the 21-year-old Youssef Hassam, provisionally suspended since May 2019, had been banned for life following his conviction on multiple match-fixing and associated corruption charges.

The punishment was imposed by Jane Mulcahy QC, a senior English lawyer, following a three-day disciplinary hearing in London in March. According to the statement, a TIU investigation revealed that in the four years from 2015-2019, Hossam "conspired with other parties to carry out an extensive campaign of betting-related corruption at the lower levels of professional tennis".

These involved 21 breaches of tennis' anti-corruption programme, including eight cases of match fixing, six of facilitating gambling, two of soliciting other players not to use best efforts, three failures to report corrupt approaches and two failures to co-operate with a TIU investigation.

Hossam, currently a lowly 810 in the ATP singles rankings, having reached a career high of 291 in December 2017, is now "permanently excluded from competing in or attending any sanctioned tennis event organised or recognised by the governing bodies of the sport", the TIU statement said. — AFP

Morgan, Rapinoe vow to push forward after legal setback

NEW YORK: US women's national soccer team co-captains Alex Morgan and Megan Rapinoe said they were shocked after their team's claims for equal pay were dismissed by a court.

The duo, who helped the US to a record fourth World Cup title last year, said they planned to appeal the decision, after a California judge on Friday threw out the players' claims that they were underpaid in comparison with the men's team.

"This decision was out of left field for us," said forward Morgan, appearing on a remote live feed on the Good Morning America programme <https://www.goodmorningamerica.com/news/video/megan-rapinoe-alex-morgan-vow-fighting-equal-pay-70485238> on Monday. "We are fighters and we will continue to fight together for this."

The World Cup-winning team's long-running feud with U.S. Soccer has been a very public and bitter battle and the players had been seeking \$66 million in damages under the Equal Pay Act.

"The WNT (Women's National Team) has been paid more on both a cumulative and an average per-game basis than the MNT (Men's National Team) over the class period," the court said in its summary judgment.

Last year's Ballon d'Or winner Rapinoe said she questioned the logic of the summary judgment.

"If I earn one dollar every time I play and a man earns three dollars, just because I win ten games and he only wins three games - and so I make 10 dollars and he made nine dollars - I'm not sure how that's me making more money," she said.

The court allowed complaints of unfair medical, travel and training to proceed to trial, which is scheduled to begin June 16.

Some of the players' high-profile backers, including women's sports pioneer Billie Jean King and presumptive U.S. Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden, leapt to their defence after news of their legal setback broke.

"Don't give up this fight. This is not over yet," Biden wrote in a tweet to the team on Saturday, then telling U.S. Soccer: "Equal pay, now. Or else when I'm president, you can go elsewhere for World Cup funding."

The U.S. Men's National Team Players Association reiterated its support for the female players in a statement on Monday.

"The USMNT players continue to stand with the WNT players in their efforts to secure equal pay," the group said.

"For a year and a half the USMNT players have made proposals to the Federation that would achieve equal pay for the USMNT and USWNT players." — Reuters

18 Virus could end Paralympic dream for British badminton player



19 German league hopes for restart go-ahead despite ten cases of virus



19 Legendary Miami Dolphins coach Don Shula dead



Baseball restarts S Korea's sports season

Football, golf will soon follow suit in a ray of hope



INCHEON: Cheerleaders pose during the opening game of South Korea's new baseball season between the SK Wyverns and Hanwha Eagles at Munhak Baseball Stadium in Incheon yesterday. South Korea's professional sport returned to action yesterday after the coronavirus shutdown with the opening of a new baseball season. — AFP

SEOUL: South Korea's professional sport returned to action after the coronavirus shutdown with the opening of a new baseball season yesterday, while football and golf will soon follow suit in a ray of hope for suspended competitions worldwide.

Friday will see the delayed start of football's K-League, and next week some of golf's leading women players will tee up in a domestic tournament as South Korea becomes a rare hotspot for live sport.

Fans were not allowed in when any of Tuesday's five opening Korean Baseball Organisation (KBO) matches saw the first pitches thrown, a marked contrast from the packed stadiums of previous years when fans sang and cheered relentlessly no matter the score.

Instead, banners with photos of masked fans stretched across the empty bleachers at the Incheon-based SK Wyverns club's Munhak Baseball Stadium. Banners carrying messages for victory were also

put up at the LG Twins club's Jamsil derby in Seoul, saying: "Even if we are apart, we are TWINS." Fans were divided over the unprecedented format.

"Baseball is finally back! But I wonder when I can actually go to the stadium," tweeted one fan. Another online user said: "This doesn't feel like the opening of a season at all. I'm watching baseball from home, hugging a pillow."

At the stadium, strict health checks and hygiene measures were enforced. Players must have their temperature checked twice before games, with face masks to be worn in all areas except the playing field and the dugouts, according to the KBO.

Players have also been asked not to shake hands or exchange high-fives, while spitting is prohibited



No spitting, no fans

— putting a new complexion on what is South Korea's most popular spectator sport.

ESPN announced it will show six KBO League games per week to fans pining for live baseball in the US, while broadcasters in 10 foreign territories have snapped up rights to air K-League matches.

South Korea endured one of the worst early outbreaks of the disease outside China, prompting professional sports to suspend or delay their seasons.

But the country appears to have brought its outbreak under control thanks to an extensive "trace, test and treat" programme. The start-up will bring welcome live action in a barren sports world where fans have had to make do with sports chan-

nels and broadcasters airing repeats of past events.

The K-League, originally due to start in February, will kick off Friday with a blockbuster clash between Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors, champions for the past three seasons, against FA Cup winners Suwon Bluewings.

And South Korea will next week become the first country to see women's professional golf resume after COVID-19. South Korean players dominate women's golf with eight featuring in the world's top 20, including number one Ko Jin-young.

The \$1.8 million the Korea Ladies Professional Golf Association (KLPGA) Championship begins on May 14 in Yangju, east of Seoul with world number six Kim Sei-young and 10th-ranked Lee Jeong-eun in the 144-strong field. South Korea has been seeing only a trickle of new coronavirus infections in recent days, with three fresh cases reported yesterday taking the total to 10,804. —AFP

Returning before US Open 'unrealistic': Fritz

TOKYO: Rising American tennis star Taylor Fritz said on Monday that he is in the best shape of his life preparing to come out of quarantine but believes it is unrealistic to expect that to happen before the US Open in August. With both the ATP and WTA tours suspended until mid-July at the earliest due to the coronavirus pandemic, Fritz is making the best of isolation at his house in Los Angeles.

The world number 24 has a gym set up at home and use of a private tennis court. "I am spending more time working out than in training these days. There is nothing else I can really do," Fritz told Reuters on Monday. Fritz said he could play tomorrow if the tour restarted and believes his extra work during isolation could pay dividends when play resumes.

"I could (play) right now. I have been practicing enough to keep my level and then with all the gym stuff I have been doing I am in the best shape ever," he said.

"I am ready to go."

"I think this time is going to be really interesting when all the players come back to play because then you are going to see which players took the time to work on their fitness and get stronger and what players didn't work during this time." The coronavirus outbreak has played havoc with the tennis season, causing the cancellation of Wimbledon and pushing the French Open back until September. Tournament organisers are hopeful that the U.S. Open, scheduled to begin in New York on August 25, can go ahead but Fritz isn't so sure. "They are aiming for a certain time, but I think that time is a little bit unrealistic," he said.

"The goal is to play the U.S. Open but personally I don't know how they are going to be able to do that." "They want to be optimistic but it is tough as it keeps being pushed back." The enforced break came at a bad time for Fritz, who reached his first ATP Final before losing to Rafael Nadal at the Mexican Open.

"That was a really big result for me so I would say

that after that my season was going really well and I was excited to bring that momentum into Indian Wells and Miami," said the 22-year-old. "So it kind of sucks that they were cancelled as I thought I had a good streak going." The uncertainty provides extra challenges for players but holding a career-high ATP ranking of 24 helps give Fritz some peace of mind.

"Mentally it is tough without having a start date. It would be easier if we had a start date," he said.

"At least, for me, mindset wise I am in a good place because I have a pretty high ranking so I am happy."

Although focused on being ready when play resumes, Fritz has been enjoying having a little bit of time away from the tour to relax and play some video games. He brought his recent real-life good form into Sunday's Stay At Home Slam where he won \$1 million for charity playing Mario Tennis alongside doubles partner, Tik Tok personality Addison Rae.

"I was excited for it because I like playing video games. I think I am pretty good," he said. "There was a million dollars for charity on the line so we wanted to make sure we practiced a little. From the first time we got introduced we were both serious about winning and she was quite competitive." — Reuters



ACAPULCO: File photo shows USA's Taylor Fritz returns the ball to Spain's Rafael Nadal (out of frame) during their Mexico ATP Open 500 men's final singles tennis match in Acapulco, Guerrero State, Mexico. — AFP