



15 Pandemic paradise for family stuck in India



16 Neighbors help out as fighting coronavirus trumps old rivalries

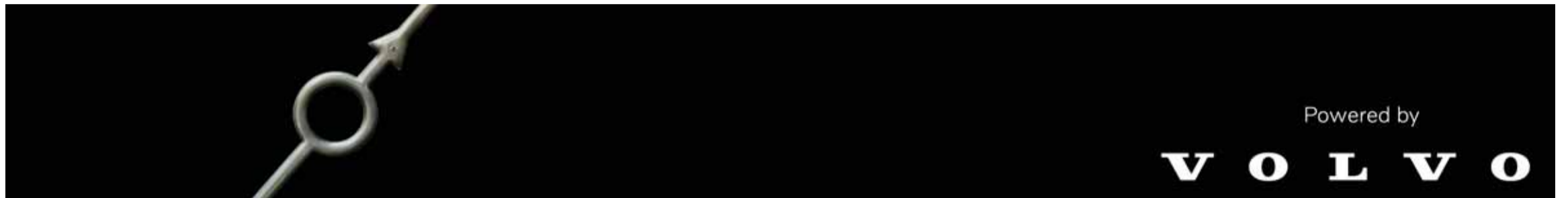


18 Nike rivals play catch-up in marathon shoe wars



Ramadan KAREEM

Fajr	03:31
Dhuhr	11:44
Asr	15:20
Maghrib	18:30
Isha	19:55



Amir urges unity, supporting govt efforts to defeat virus

Sheikh Sabah says time to focus on using resources wisely and effectively

Full lockdown from May 10

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The Cabinet has decided to impose a total lockdown in the country for three weeks starting Sunday, May 10 until May 30 after a steep rise in the number of coronavirus cases, government spokesman Tareq Al-Mizrem announced. The decision was made during an extraordinary meeting held by the Cabinet on Friday to assess the health situation in the country, Mizrem said.

Mizrem said the lockdown was decided based on recommendations by the health **Continued on Page 16**

KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah said yesterday that it was paramount for the people of Kuwait to support government efforts to counter the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, standing in unity to defeat this menace. In his annual television address on the occasion of the last days of the holy month of Ramadan, HH the Amir stressed the importance of following guidelines set by the country's health authorities, namely the upcoming full lockdown.

"Ramadan this year came during the fast spread of COVID-19 with the whole world and Kuwait being affected," indicated HH the Amir, who stressed that efforts should be focused on finding a successful cure for the virus. Cooperation between state entities and private bodies had successfully set procedures to address the current challenge, HH Sheikh Sabah affirmed, thanking all individuals who par-

ticipated in the fight against the virus.

HH the Amir also commended government efforts which led to the successful repatriation of Kuwait citizens abroad. HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, the Cabinet, as well as senior officials played an important role in countering COVID-19, said the Amir, who asked the people to ponder the lessons learned from the current dilemma. He added the pandemic had resulted in various challenges including the decrease in oil prices and investments, noting that it was time to focus on using resources wisely and effectively. The legislative and executive powers now have the role of wisely spending resources to overcome the current dilemma and move forward towards a bright future, said HH the Amir, who took also the chance to congratulate the people on was remaining period of the current blessed month, Ramadan. — KUNA



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah addresses the nation yesterday during his annual televised address on the occasion of the last days of the holy month of Ramadan. — KUNA

Gulf faces exodus of expatriates

DUBAI/RIYADH: A popular Saudi talk show host told private businesses this week it was their national duty to lay off foreign rather than local employees, warning that the dominance of Saudi Arabia's workforce by expatriates was a "real danger". Khaled Al-Oqaily's comments on his daily TV show encapsulated the dilemma faced by 35 million foreigners who form the Gulf's economic backbone: As firms shed jobs because of the coronavirus pandemic and oil price crash, and governments move to protect citizens' jobs and wages, should they stay or go?

The expatriate exodus is expected to be larger than after the 2008-2009 financial crisis and the 2014-2015 plunge in prices for oil, the region's main export, the International Labor Organization (ILO) said, without giving figures. In Oman alone, the number of expatriates dropped by over 340,000 in 2010 following the 2008-2009 crisis, according to official data. That year, Oman's economic growth slowed by 1.3 percentage points, World Bank data show.

This time around, many foreign workers remain stranded without a safety net as Gulf states try to organize ways of getting them home. Hundreds of thousands of migrants, mostly Asians, have registered for repatriation, according to figures from embassies and authorities in the region, which has seen COVID-19 spread among low-income foreign workers in overcrowded living quarters.

Pakistan and India have started evacu-

ating citizens from the Gulf. Egypt has begun repatriation flights from Kuwait, where security forces quelled a riot by Egyptians at a shelter housing residency violators last week. In the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Qatar the numbers leaving "could be very significant", said Ryszard Cholewinski, ILO's senior migration specialist for Arab states.

Farman, one of 60,000 Pakistanis registered to leave the UAE, lost his job as a school bus driver two months ago after education centers closed under virus containment measures. "I want to go home because what's the point of staying without work?" he said, standing in a dimly lit street in front of communal housing in Dubai's Al Quoz industrial area. And it is not only blue-collar workers who are caught up in the coronavirus squeeze.

Continued on Page 16



CHENNAI: A health official takes a swab sample for a coronavirus test from an Indian citizen evacuated from Dubai by an Air India flight at the Anna International Airport on Friday. — AFP

Repatriated Pakistanis test positive

ISLAMABAD: Hundreds of Pakistanis who were repatriated from the Middle East - where many lost jobs amid coronavirus shutdowns and were living in cramped conditions - have tested positive for COVID-19, officials said Friday. Pakistan has so far brought about 20,000 nationals home, among them a large number of unskilled workers who had been laboring in Gulf nations only to see their jobs disappear as lockdowns slowed economic activity.

Of the 2,069 Pakistanis returning from the Middle East to the southern province of Sindh, more than 500 tested positive for the coronavirus, Murad Ali Shah, Sindh's chief minister, told a press conference. And in the northwestern province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a senior government official told AFP that more than 200 of the 1,600 passengers repatriated to the city of Peshawar had tested positive. According to the foreign office, about 4.5 million Pakistanis work in the Middle East.

In addition to the 20,000 who have already come back, around 110,000 more overseas Pakistanis have registered a desire to return home. Pakistan has been chartering flights to bring back stranded nationals, as commercial flights into the country have been halted. Laborers in many Gulf nations live in crowded **Continued on Page 16**

World leaders scrutinized over masks

PARIS: Donald Trump has not donned one. Emmanuel Macron boasted a small French flag on his. Slovakia's president made a fashion statement by sporting a fuchsia-colored one to match her outfit. As the world starts emerging from coronavirus lockdowns, political leaders are being closely scrutinized over their choice to wear a mask - or not - as

many people question seemingly mixed messages about the value of face coverings as infection barriers.

Many Western governments counselled against face masks for the general public at the start of the outbreak, which has now claimed more than a quarter of a million lives worldwide. But as people start returning to work despite the absence of a treatment or vaccine, masks are now being encouraged or even required as a critical anti-virus tool, along with hand washing and social distancing.

As government advice has changed, leaders have had to decide: to cover up or not? "The decision to **Continued on Page 16**

Turkish doctors turn detectives to track virus

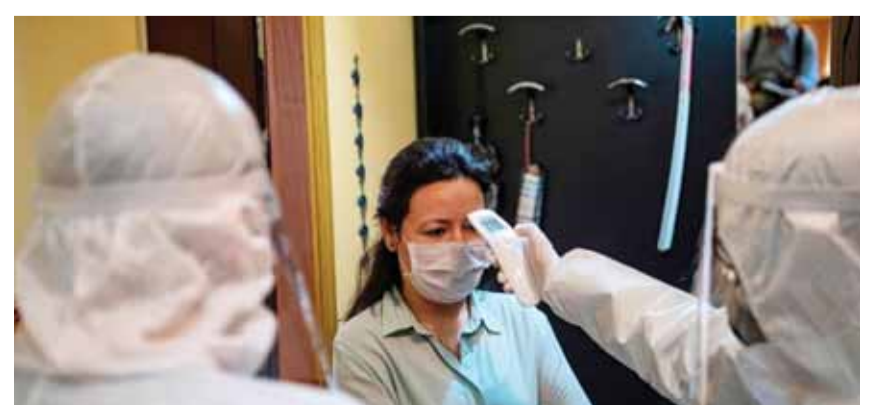
ISTANBUL: In full protective gear, two doctors climb the stairs four at a time. Their first task of the day: To test a woman who has had contact with a coronavirus patient in Istanbul. Visibly perturbed by the appearance of men in white bodysuits on her landing, the resident in the populous Fatih district answers their questions before she is tested. She will get her results the **Continued on Page 16**

next day. In Turkey, nearly 6,000 teams of "tracers" - all health professionals - track potential COVID-19 cases 24 hours a day by identifying and following up with people who have had contact with patients. By helping find new cases who are then quickly isolated and treated, the Turkish government says tracing has helped to contain the outbreak and limit the number of deaths.

Even if some observers have questioned the reliability of official figures, Turkey's death toll seems relatively low given the number of infections - with 3,641 fatalities recorded and **Continued on Page 16**



This combination of file pictures shows political leaders wearing face masks during the coronavirus pandemic. — AFP



ISTANBUL: A health officer checks the temperature of a resident, believed to have been in contact with coronavirus patients, before collecting swab samples on May 7, 2020. — AFP

Local

Kuwait repatriated 29,168 citizens through four phases

81% citizens who expressed desire to return were repatriated

KUWAIT: A total of 29,168 citizens have been repatriated between April 19 and May 6, part of a massive plan to bring nationals back home due to spread of coronavirus, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) said Thursday. The number of citizens who registered in the 'With You' online platform was 42,584 but those who showed desire to return stood at 35,848 nationals, said Saad Al-Otaibi, head of repatriation flights' operation at DGCA. He said in a statement 81.37 percent of citizens who expressed desire to return were repatriated, and 18.63 percent did not join the plan because they changed their mind or wished to continue their treatment abroad. He said the first phase of the plan carried 9,267 people from 16 destinations between April 19-21. This phase included Riyadh, Dammam, Jeddah, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Manama, Doha, Muscat, Cairo, Alexandria, Amman, Istanbul, Ankara, London, Geneva and Paris.

Otaibi said 8,489 citizens were repatriated in the second phase, which took place on April 23-25 and included 26 destinations: Cairo, Alexandria, Amman, Istanbul, Casablanca, Tunis, Beirut, Larnaca, Nouak-

chott, Dakar, Valletta, Tbilisi, Baku, Mumbai, Delhi, Trivandrum, Manila, Bangkok, Sarajevo, Amsterdam, Vienna, London, Paris, Brussels, Munich and New York. The third phase, on April 27-29, brought back 5,685 Kuwaitis from 17 destinations: Hael, Abu Dhabi, London, Gatwick, Manchester, Warsaw, Jakarta, Singapore, Sydney, Oaklands, Perth, Glasgow, Dublin, Yerevan, Moscow and New York. The fourth plan, which concluded the repatriation plan, brought back 5,727 citizens from Al-Najaf, Cairo, Barcelona, London,

Montreal, Washington, Dallas, Miami, Los Angeles, Perth, Sydney and Melbourne. Otaibi explained the repatriation plan was conducted by Kuwait Airways, Jazeera Airways, Etihad Airways and Qatar Airways.

Saleh Al-Faddaghi, DGCA's Deputy Director General for Kuwait International Airport, said 118 citizens who were repatriated tested positive for the coronavirus. He said in a statement 3,916 citizens asked to be placed in mandatory quarantine, and 24,424 were left to stay in home quarantine. Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Health and Interior, DGCA, custom department, the fire department, Kuwait Red Crescent Society, Kuwait Airways and Jazeera Airways joined



118 repatriated citizens test positive



KUWAIT: Saad Al-Otaibi, head of repatriation flights' operation at DGCA, and Saleh Al-Faddaghi, DGCA's Deputy Director General for Kuwait International Airport attend the press conference. — KUNA

hands to implement the repatriation plan, which was ordered by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. This was the largest repa-

triation plan in Kuwait compared to the 1991 liberation of Kuwait, in 2006 and 2008 from Lebanon, and in 2011 and 2013 from Egypt. — KUNA

Pandemic Diaries

Kuwait's 20-day challenge



By Jamie Etheridge

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The Cabinet decided Friday night to place Kuwait on total curfew for the next 20 days - starting from today at 4 pm until Saturday, May 30. The total curfew means no one may leave their home except for appointments to grocery shop or for a two-hour window from 4:30-6:30 pm daily, where we may walk in our neighborhoods.

Predictably, the announcement triggered a wave of panic buying and Saturday morning grocery stores, vegetable markets, butcheries and all other food shops were packed (the panic buying had actually started a few days earlier when rumors of the total lockdown first surfaced). But Kuwait has proven with the closure of the airport and then the imposition of the partial curfew that food will continue to be available.

The total curfew is scary not because it means we may run out of food or other basic necessities, but because it means 20 days of isolation. Kuwait has been under stay-at-home orders for nine weeks already. Our children have been stuck at home, unable to go out for more than 70 days. The strain of staying at home, of being isolated from family and friends, from going out, from any type of change can be overwhelming.

At the same time, we now have what hopefully will be a clear and fixed deadline - 20 days and then the country will open again! Twenty days till freedom! We can block out a calendar and count it down. There is an end in sight, a day zero we can work towards.

I am not fan of the popular 30-day challenges people often do. Thirty days of yoga, 30 days of drawing, 30 days of no sugar, 30 days of self-care, 30 days of photography...Google search '30 day challenges' - there are literally thousands of ideas. I can never complete the full 30 days. I'm always too busy, life intervenes and I end up not doing whatever challenge I've set myself and I almost always end up feeling like a failure.

But now we all have a 20-day challenge ahead of us. We will have the time and we will most definitely need the distraction. So my family and I will do a few 20-day challenges. Perhaps we will do 20 days of being kind to each other, 20 days of physical activity (we will have time to walk outside), 20 days of creativity and 20 days of prayer/meditation.

Twenty days seems like a long time; a difficult challenge to achieve and I know I will hit snags, low points and depressions, where it seems the 20 days will never end. So I will break the 20 days into four blocks of five days each and start counting down. Anyone can manage five days. Five days is nothing, a snap of the fingers. And in that way, insha'Allah, we will live and enjoy this next 20 days. Ready. Set. Go.

Coronavirus in Kuwait: What we know so far

KUWAIT: Kuwait has recorded 7,208 cases infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) as of Friday, in addition to 47 deaths. With the exception of 90 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, 2,466 people have recovered completely after previously being infected with the virus, while there are 4,695 people receiving treatment and 4,715 quarantined. Kuwait is taking measures to test Kuwaitis coming from infected areas for potential infection, as it has already tested thousands of people.

Curfew

Kuwait imposed a total curfew from May 10 to May 30, allowing room for people to walk out for daily exercise between 4:30 pm to 6:30 pm, and to shop at co-ops once a week during the curfew hours by making an appointment through www.moci.shop. Earlier, Kuwait enforced a country-wide partial 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 can be used 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.

In my view

Being positive-2



By Abdellatif Sharaa

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Going through my Facebook messages, I noticed the following story and would like to share it with you:

A friend had a domestic problem with his wife that almost ended their marriage. Each one of them was not accepting a word from the other, and life together was extremely impossible to a point he asked me to start divorce procedures. When I went to meet them, I stipulated that both be present at home. I found each one of them was giving their back to the other, and their facial expressions reflected anger.

Without warning, I decided to set the most difficult part of this problem aside, as the wife insisted on getting a divorce. I abruptly asked the husband to tell me how he asked her to marry him. He smiled and said you are taking me 30 years back, then went ahead to speak about a hot love story, and each time he stopped I asked him to continue while his wife was smiling until he spoke about how he fought everyone for her sake, to a point she almost started another problem because he did not tell her about what he faced and endured and almost forgot the original problem. I then asked her to say why she married him. The surprise was that she faced larger challenges than him, and he was listening attentively.

Here, when I was able to melt the largest mass of ice between them, I excused myself, and while on my way to the door, the wife asked me why I was leaving before settling the issue, so I asked her what issue? You got married after a love story and each one fought hard for the sake of the other, then now you want to destroy everything with your own hands? I asked the husband to apologize to his wife and left, and things went back to normal between them.

The merit of the story is how to use positivity to solve problems. It is actually in the nature of the human being to make mistakes - some are small and can be ignored or forgotten, while others are very difficult to keep aside due to their effect on the individual's life. Fortunately, there are ways that help continue life normally and as usual.

One has to be true and realistic. Some people justify their mistakes as a "white lie" which does not harm, but the truth is, a lie is a lie regardless of how we present it. The best thing for one to do is to take responsibility and admit mistakes. An individual may think he is stupid due to his admittance, but such a feeling is short-lived.

Another thing - one should not be hard on himself as it is normal for one to be sad or embarrassed after making a certain mistake, but you must remember that you should not continue living under the control of those negative feelings. So try to find a suitable way to help release the tension, and this can be through talking to a friend or a trusted person. One effective way is to go for a walk or write down your feelings to identify them correctly, then deal with them the right way.

An important act is to apologize, although some people think apologizing indicates weak personality, although the truth is to the contrary. Apologizing shows the person being able to take responsibility for his mistakes, which means readiness to correct the mistakes or at least not making them again later. We really should be aware of what may be the effects of the mistake down the road even after some time, and consider the severity of it, so that help can be sought to avoid any negative repercussions.

Local

Co-ops continue services; two-hour daily exercise allowed during full curfew

Al-Khairan Resort to be used as field hospital



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah chairs an extraordinary cabinet meeting through live video call Friday. — KUNA photos

Deputy Premier and Minister of Interior Anas Al-Saleh attends the meeting.

KUWAIT: Minister of Social Affairs Maryam Al-Aqeel said Friday cooperate societies, ration supply branches and gas cylinder distributors would continue offering services during a full curfew, to enter force at 4:00 pm today. People can make an appointment online at www.moci.shop to shop in the co-op society located in their respective area of residence. An appointment can be made once a week for a 30-minute shopping period.

Aqeel, also Minister of State for Economic Affairs, called on the public to abide by the health instructions while shopping. Aqeel, at an online press conference following the extraordinary cabinet meeting, said people could do online booking for shopping at cooperative societies, which should be once a week by one person only. She added people who live in areas with no cooperative societies could shop in



Cabinet ministers are seen on a large monitor during a video call meeting with His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.



Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah attends the meeting.

Sponsors pay for expats' deportation

neighboring areas.

Kuwait's government decided Friday to impose a full curfew as of 4:00 pm today, May 10, until May 30, as part of measures to stem the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), but would only allow people to exercise for two hours a day inside their areas and without cars being used. The government, in a live video call chaired by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, decided to limit issuance of curfew permits for people working in vital departments, Deputy Premier and Minister of Interior Anas Al-Saleh said in a statement. It formed emergency teams in the six governorates to follow up implementation of curfew and deal with emergency cases, said Saleh, also Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs.

Public cooperation

Saleh meanwhile urged citizens and expatriates to cooperate with security authorities towards implementing a full curfew 'for their own safety.' "We are in the last phase of these measures and it is the full curfew, which will extend until after Eid Al-Fitr," Saleh said during the press conference. This will be followed by "gradual return to normal life, and by then the health authorities will have completed all necessary tests and deal with this disease," said Saleh.

Meanwhile, Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah said that the ministry is capable of receiving and isolating coronavirus patients who do not show symptoms while they are in mandatory quarantine. "At this stage, we can provide mandatory quarantine for coronavirus patients," Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah told an online news conference following the meeting. MoH is placing those patients in mandatory quarantine in order to lessen speed of spread of the virus, he said. Sheikh Basel said 50 percent of infected did not show symptoms thus their presence in hospitals were not required, so they were sent to mandatory quarantine facilities.

Daily exercise

The government gave people a grace period between 4:30 - 6:30 pm every day to exercise inside residential areas but without use of cars. They, however, need to wear masks and abide by physical distancing, said Saleh. He said only necessary government departments would be working, stopping of operation of private sector unless contractors determined by the cabinet, stopping home deliveries with exception of cooperative societies, food stores and pharmacies. Saleh also said live interview by media outlets would be suspended to be replaced by online interviews. Distribution of newspapers and media publications will be halted too. The government hoped the public would abide by the full curfew and comply with health authorities' instructions, foremost staying at home, avoid crowds, physical distancing and the use of

masks. This compliance, said Saleh, would contribute to curbing and ultimately elimination of the virus, which would allow gradual reopening and return of normal life.

Field hospital

The cabinet also assigned the Public Investment Authority to hand over Al-Khairan Resort to the Ministry of Health to be used as a field hospital. It instructed the MoH to hand over the remaining quantity of masks it received from Ministry of Commerce and Industry to the Ministry of Social Affairs, and the latter would be distributing them to the cooperative societies to be sold by 100 fils per mask. The government urged all people to wear any type of masks in all public areas, shopping centers and work places. The MoH will instruct pharmacies to

provide masks for the public, said Saleh. Meanwhile, people who were renting from ministries and government departments will be exempted from payment of the lease during these exceptional times. The government, on the other hand, thanked the team that accomplished the repatriation plan of Kuwaiti citizens between April 19 and May 6, a plan that was conducted upon instructions of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Violating expats

In the meantime, Saleh said that expatriates who are in violation of residency law will be deported at the expense of their sponsors. The government will not pay for the deportation of the violating expatriates, said Saleh, because it would be at the expense of the sponsors of

those persons, a statement by the cabinet said. The Ministry of Interior allowed expatriates who are in violation of the residency law to leave the country without paying any fines. Those expatriates of different nationalities came forward for registration centers during April and the deportation process already began.

Separately, the cabinet during the meeting welcomed the new Iraqi government of Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhemi who won the parliament's confidence late on Wednesday. The government hoped the new government would contribute to Iraq's security, stability and prosperity, Saleh said. It hoped relations with Iraq continued to flourish in all domains in a drive to honor aspirations of people of the two countries, and boost security and stability of the region. — KUNA

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Struggle is real for renters in Kuwait as COVID-19 crisis continues

'No free stay' for Mahboula and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh renters

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: The struggle is real for many expat renters in Kuwait, especially those with no work and no pay as the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis continues with no end in sight. Some tenants were on vacation, and since there are no inbound flights, they are stranded in their home countries without a chance of coming back soon. "I left Kuwait towards the end of February. I had no idea that I would be stuck here and could not be home on time. Now, the reality is clear. I still cannot come back because of the flight ban. I cannot do anything now but sell all my belongings in my room," said Richard Rey, who works at an Arabic and Japanese restaurant in Kuwait City.

"I am giving up my room in order to pay for the place I rented - I have to sell everything including the fridge, cabinet, TV and PS4. All my things will be sold so I can pay my March and April rent. Then I told them to rent it out to anyone. There's nothing I can do. I told my boss that I am still ready to join - he only needs to renew my iqama, but I haven't got a reply from my boss so I will stay here in the Philippines," he said.

For some renters in Mahboula and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh; two areas that have been under total lockdown for over a month, there is no such thing as free stay. "You would think they would be more compassionate now since we are in isolation, but there is no such thing as compassion. For them it's business as usual - we have an obligation to pay our

monthly rent less 20 percent," said May, a tenant in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh. "I asked many renters here - some are paying in full, some are being asked to pay half. To give a 20 percent discount is not acceptable, but even if they say to pay the whole amount, we cannot do anything - they own the flat," she said.

“ I have to sell everything ”

A leaser of several flats in Mahboula admitted to have instructed most of her tenants to pay the rent. "They have no work, but the company told them they are going to pay. The flat owners told us to pay the full amount too, so there's nothing we can do at all," she said.

Some building owners have waived the full amount of rent. "They give us free rent for April, in March it was 50 percent, but May we don't know yet. But this is pretty good on the part of the building owners to give us this big discount, we really appreciate it," Meliza told Kuwait Times. "I have not moved for the last 12 years, so they know I am loyal and pay on time. Now that we have this pandemic, they



KUWAIT: This April 28, 2020 file photo shows people lining up to receive food aid in Mahboula during total lockdown. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

should really be understanding of the predicament of people," she said. The coronavirus pandemic has severely affected many workers in Kuwait. Some were able to pay rent in February and March, while some workers had said they would not be able to pay

the April or May rent. "If they insist I pay, I cannot pay - I don't have money. I will call the police if they try to evict me from my flat. They know the situation - why should they insist when we all know we don't have money," said Ahmed, an Egyptian tenant.



Police arrest drug dealer with 30,000 pills

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Police recently arrested a drug dealer with 30,000 Captagon pills found in his possession. The suspect admitted to have smuggled the drugs into Kuwait a month ago, the Ministry of Interior (MoI) said. Drug enforcement personnel arrested the drug

leader, who was previously charged for related crimes, MoI said in a statement. It said the ministry agreed with a source in a country it did not name to inform them about smuggling of a large quantity of narcotics for a drug dealer inside Kuwait. MoI personnel were also monitoring the drug dealer for two weeks, it said. A secret source managed to meet the dealer to buy Captagon pills for a small amount of money. The source, it added, asked for a larger quantity and the dealer was busted during the delivery time and the law enforcement officers found 30,000 Captagon pills, thus the dealer confessed of smuggling them for the purpose of sale. He was transferred to the public prosecution for further action.

Kuwait oil price down to \$20.63 pb

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti oil went down by 97 cents to \$20.63 per barrel Friday as opposed to \$21.60 pb the day before, said the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) yesterday.

Meanwhile, the price of the West Texas Intermediate went up by \$1.19 pb to \$24.74 pb, the same case with the Brent crude, which went up by \$1.51 to \$30.97 pb. — KUNA

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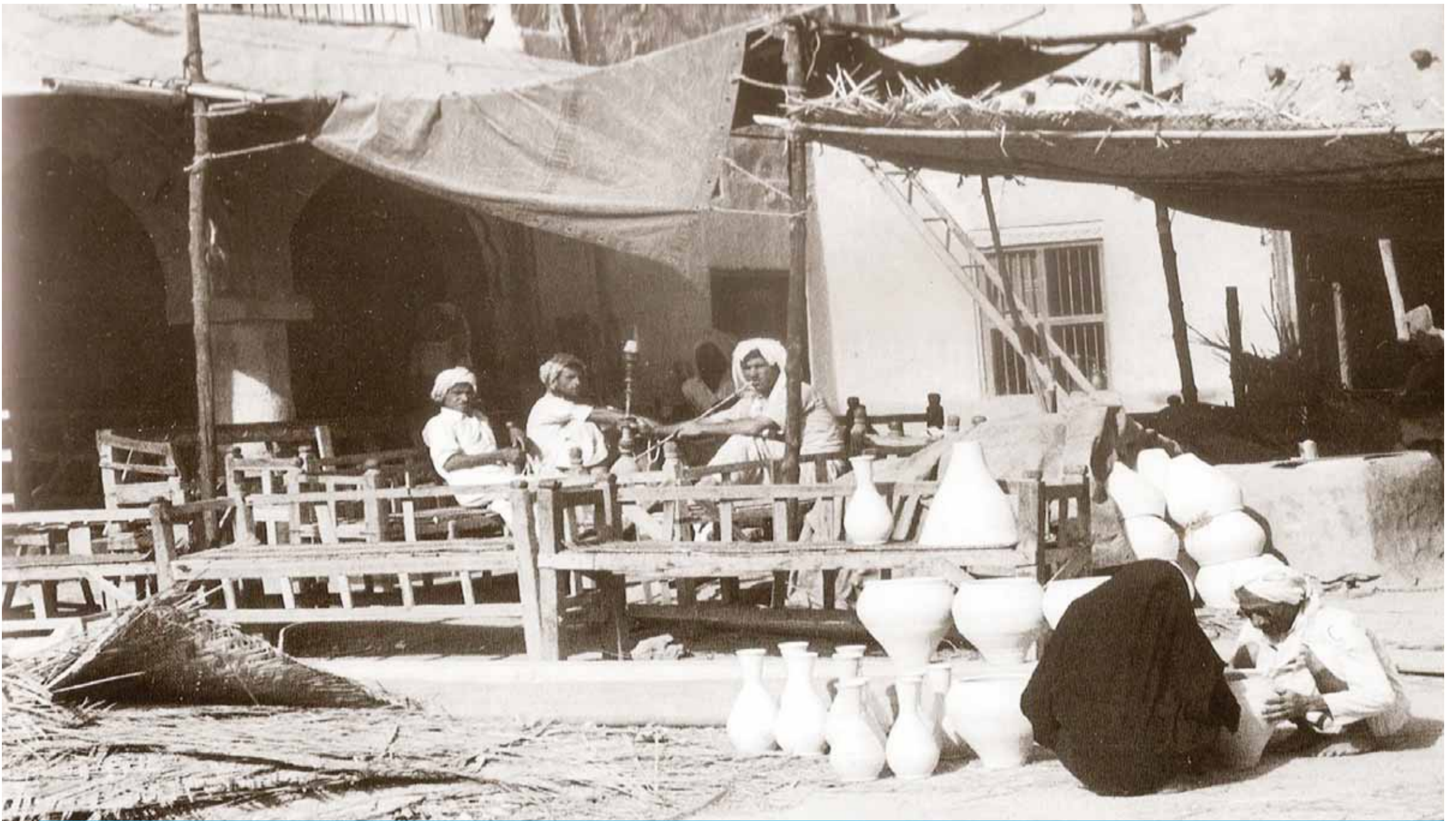
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KUWAIT: A team from the Public Authority for Manpower carried out an inspection campaign recently at labor residences and restaurants to check on workers' visas, as well as compliance with regulations to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). — Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh

Local

Kuwait Heritage



KUWAIT: A woman inspects pots for sale while men relax in a coffee shop. The picture was taken at a local market circa 1949. (Source: *Kuwait in the Eyes of Early Photographers*, William Facey, Gillian Gran, London, 1989. Prepared by: Mahmoud Aakaria Abu Alella, researcher in heritage, Ministry of Information)



KUWAIT: As soon as Kuwait's government announced Friday afternoon a total curfew to begin today, co-ops, supermarkets and other shops around the country became heavily crowded as people went on a panic buying spree to stockpile on basic necessities. Authorities have announced that co-ops will continue serving the public during the total curfew through the online portal www.mocli.shop. — Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh



Seven deadly sins in Islam

By Yasmein Mohammad Salim

Religion is a unified system of belief, values and practices. Hence, it sets the ground rules for what can/cannot be done by its followers. There are certain guidelines in Islam for Muslims to do good and avoid sins and heresy. These guidelines are from the Holy Quran and the sayings of the Prophet Mohammad (pbuh). One of the sayings (Hadith) of the Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) refers to the seven deadly sins in Islam.

The Prophet (pbuh) explained the seven sins that doom a person to Hell in a saheeh hadith that was narrated by the two Shaykhs, al-Bukhaari and Muslim, in as-Saheehayn, in which it was narrated that the Prophet (pbuh) said, "Avoid the seven sins that doom a person to Hell." We said, "What are they, O Messenger of Allah?" He said, "Associating others with Allah (shirk); witchcraft; killing a soul whom Allah has forbidden us to kill, except in cases dictated by Islamic law; devouring orphans' wealth; consuming Riba; fleeing from the battlefield; and slandering chaste and innocent women."

1. Shirk is ascribing partners with Allah, and is indeed the greatest of all sins. It is stated in the Noble Qur'an: "Allah forgives not that partners should be set up with Him, but He forgives anything else, to whom He pleases. To set up partners with Allah is to devise a sin most heinous indeed" (Qur'an 4:48).

2. Committing witchcraft is also a kind of shirk, because it involves worshipping the jinn as well as seeking their help to misguide people. The black magic that is used harms people and creates illusions by the means of jinn. The Prophet (pbuh) warned about fortune-tellers and said, "Whoever goes to a fortune-teller and asks him about something, his prayers will not be accepted for forty days". [Sheeh Muslim]

3. Murder or killing a soul whom Allah (swt) has forbidden us to kill is a great sin. Allah (swt) states in the Noble Qur'an: "We ordained therein for them: "Life for life, eye for eye, nose for nose, ear for ear, tooth for tooth, and wounds, equal for equal." But if any one remits the retaliation by way of charity, it is an act of atonement for him. And if anyone fails to judge by (the light of) what Allah has revealed, they are (no better than) wrongdoers". (Qur'an 5:45)

4. Devouring an Orphan's wealth is a not permissible as an orphan is weak and needs care, and a real believer must handle an orphan's wealth properly and develop it rather than waste it uselessly.

5. Consuming Riba (Usury or interest) is explained by the Oxford dictionary, the action or practice of lending money at unreasonably high rates of interest. This should not be mistaken with trading as "Allah has permitted trade and forbidden Riba" (Qur'an 2:275). Trading is permissible because it helps a poor man and any person who collects money and invests with it, but regarding Riba, the rich usually manipulate the poor and the poor end up becoming more miserable.

6. Turning your back to your enemy and fleeing the battlefield is another sin. This is a sin as this act may affect the troops of believers and they may end up losing the battle and it is a form of treachery. "O you who believe, when you meet those who disbelieve marching to war, then turn not your backs to them. And whoever shall turn his back to them on that day- unless he turns aside for the sake of fighting or withdraws to a company then he, indeed, becomes deserving of Allah's wrath and his abode is hell; and an evil destination shall it be." (Qur'an 8:15-16)

7. Lastly, slandering chaste women is by blaming and throwing false accusation on them. This also a sin if done against men. Allah (SWT) says: "Verily, those who accuse chaste women, who never even think of anything touching their chastity and are good believers - are cursed in this life and in the Hereafter, and for them will be a great torment" (Qur'an 24:23).

Specifying the seven deadly sins hence, is among the means of discipline people. Being virtuous and not committing any of these sins may be difficult and even impossible as we are all fallible human-beings and we are bound to make mistakes. Nevertheless, we should always strengthen our faith and pray for Allah (SWT) for His guidance to keep us away from sins, big and small as much as possible. May Allah (the Almighty) guide us all to the right path and keep us on it.

- Courtesy of the TIES Center: The TIES Center is the social and educational hub for English Speaking Muslims in Kuwait and aims at empower Kuwait's expats through social and educational services that promote a positive and productive role in society, and to facilitate opportunities for intra- and interfaith interactions that promote social solidarity. For more information, you can contact TIES at Tel:25231015/6; Hotline:94079777; e-mail: info@tiescenter.net.



Somalia's faithful undeterred even as virus spreads

End of an era: Bangladesh's last Armenian dies

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BEIRUT: Worshippers perform Friday prayers during the holy month of Ramadan while keeping a safe distance from each other at the Mohammed Al-Amin Mosque in the capital's downtown district after some measures that were taken by the authorities in a bid to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus were eased. — AFP

Could COVID lead to positive change?

Brave the new world: A concept like basic universal income

LONDON: Major social advances have often emerged from the depths of disaster: the Black Death brought an end to serfdom, and Britain's welfare state emerged from the ruins of World War II. As the coronavirus outbreak took hold, many governments brought in policies previously dismissed as "utopian", such as backing wages or housing the homeless.

But as emergency measures are eased, and the world tries to get back a semblance of normality, there is debate about which, if any, could-or should-be kept. In Britain, as elsewhere, the crisis has shone a light on the plight of underpaid delivery drivers, teachers, nurses and other key workers who have been vital to the response. The government has stepped in to guarantee salaries of the five million self-employed because of fears that without statutory sick pay they would continue to work while ill.

Finance minister Rishi Sunak has already begun talking about scaling back the measures, which back 80 percent of someone's average monthly salary up to £2,500 (\$3,100, 2,850 euros). But David Napier, professor of medical anthropology at University College London, said withdrawal could prove problematic given the imbalances the virus has highlighted. "The strong have been depending on the weak for their survival," he told AFP.

'Magic money'

In the United States, 30 million people have already lost their jobs because of the pandemic's economic impact. To keep the economy afloat, President Donald Trump's Republican administration has included direct cash payments of up to \$3,000 per family in its stim-



UK to house the homeless in empty hotels

ulus package. Oxford University historian Timothy Garton Ash noted that a concept like basic universal income was considered "radical, if not utopian" not so long ago. But a recent study from his university indicated that 71 percent of Europeans now supported the idea. Doctors and nurses on the frontline of tackling the global pandemic have campaigned for years

to get pay rises and more resources.

In France, President Emmanuel Macron initially said there was no "magic money" for the sector but later promised more investment. In Britain, the state-run National Health Service has been hit by a decade of cuts in funding and staffing following the 2008 financial crisis. But Prime Minister Boris Johnson, whose Conservative party has been accused of wanting to privatize the free service, has become one of its staunchest defenders.

He was treated at an NHS hospital for COVID-19 and credits its doctors with saving his life. But Mark Harrison, a professor of economic history at Warwick University, said even that has policy implications. "The simple story of the PM who got saved by the NHS is very powerful, it will be hard for the Conservatives to try to go back on that type of commitment." Elsewhere, the British government moved to house homeless people in empty hotels and hostels, because of the risk of them contracting the virus.

Ministers have said some 5,400 people or 90 percent of those who usually sleep on the streets and are known to local authorities have been housed. The charity Crisis puts the total number of homeless at 170,000, and said many more were on the verge of being evicted from rented accommodation because of

the outbreak. But Jasmine Basran, from Crisis, called the government's response "incredible". "It shows what is possible if there's political will," she said.

Goodwill limit

As the full impact of the crisis becomes known, there are calls for the government to guide industrial policy, similar to the Marshall Plan for reconstruction after World War II. The director of the International Energy Agency, Fatih Birol, has urged world leaders to prioritize green energy as they try to kick-start their economies. Germany has made state aid conditional on firms pledging climate targets and France has said a seven-billion-euro bailout of Air France is dependent on a cut in short-haul flights and emissions.

But business leaders are resisting attempts to introduce initiatives to cut waste and the use of plastic. For Warwick professor Harrison, the crisis "has the potential to change people's perceptions" for the better over the long term. But Sankalp Chaturvedi, a professor of organizational behavior and leadership at Imperial College Business School in London, said goodwill would only go so far. "This generosity will come with higher taxes," he said, predicting that short-term help would lead to anxiety and frustration. — AFP

How does virus infect children?

PARIS: With parents and policymakers agonizing over when to reopen schools as lockdowns ease, scientists are still struggling to find out how the new coronavirus affects children. While youngsters can become infected with the new coronavirus, very few have died or contracted serious symptoms. But could they still spread contagion? Here is what we know so far.

Are children at risk?

This is one of the few questions where there is broad agreement. Only a tiny proportion of children appear to have become seriously ill with COVID-19. "There are three key questions: How much do children get COVID-19; how badly does it affect them; and do they spread it to others?" said Russell Viner, President of Britain's Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health. "We only have good data about the second of these." Specialists writing for the British pediatric website Don't Forget The Bubbles (DFTB) said in a recent roundup of international research that only around one percent of critical cases involved children, while "deaths remain extremely rare".

Do they get infected?

The short answer is yes. "Research indicates that children and adolescents are just as likely to become infected as any other age group and can spread the disease," says the World Health Organization. But this is not reflected in global official data about the virus, with many countries largely focusing their COVID-19 testing on those who have gone to hospital with severe symptoms. France's health agency, which has amalgamated data from a host of international studies, said pediatric cases represent between one and five percent of all officially-documented global infections. It said this is because children catch the virus, but generally exhibit only "mild" symptoms - or no symptoms at all - meaning they go uncounted. But other experts believe that chil-

dren, especially those under the age of 10, might not be getting infected as much in the first place.

"It appears fairly convincing that children are less likely to acquire the infection than adults, by a significant amount," said specialists Alasdair Munro and Damian Roland of DFTB. Their conclusions were based on several international contact tracing studies that looked at how the disease spread and to whom. They also assessed data from places that have carried out mass community-wide testing - South Korea, Iceland and the Italian principality of Vo - all of which found that the proportion of infected children was far smaller than adults.

But are they silent vectors?

This is the area of greatest uncertainty. Initially researchers believed they could be spreading the disease, drawing comparisons with other viruses like the flu where children help accelerate infections. But recent studies on the new coronavirus suggest that they are less likely to transmit the virus. In one incident, a nine-year-old was among 12 people infected in a super-spreading event at a chalet in the Haute-Savoie region of France, after a British man returned from Singapore and went on a ski holiday.

A study of the incident - one of the first major clusters of infection in France - showed that the child, who only displayed mild symptoms, came into contact with 172 people while sick. None of them contracted COVID-19, not even the youngster's two siblings. But the child did transmit other winter viruses, including the flu. Children could be less infectious because they do not have as many symptoms and do not cough, French expert Arnaud Fontanet told a parliamentary hearing last week. But a German study last month led by virologist Christian Drosten, an adviser to Angela Merkel, concluded that children had a viral load comparable to that of adults. They "could be as contagious", it added. Other scientists, including Munro, have disputed both the methodology of that study and its conclusion. Re-analysing the data they said it might even be possible to draw the opposite conclusion - that age and viral load are correlated. Even so, we cannot say for sure that a higher viral load makes a person more infectious. — AFP

Back to school? Challenges loom

PARIS: Authorities worldwide face the formidable challenge of returning millions of children to classrooms shut due to the coronavirus outbreak, weighing the need to limit the educational damage against the risks of fuelling a surge in new cases. Although young people appear less vulnerable to COVID-19, experts say they could still be a vector for contagion, a major worry for both parents and teachers. "Some are impatient to renew the contact with students, but others are scared," said Xavier Toussaint, a secondary school teacher in Waterloo, Belgium.

And even if the crisis eases, social distancing measures will drastically change how classrooms look-and how children interact with their teachers and each other-for months, if not years. At Toussaint's school of 800 pupils, only 10 classes consisting of small groups will resume from May 18, meaning officials will have to choose who can come. "The requirement is a maximum of 10 per class, with four square meters of space per student, plus eight square meters for the teacher," he said.

Similar restrictions are planned across Europe: France is ordering continual hand-washings throughout the day, no group play at recess, one-way hallways to avoid mingling, and face masks for all but the youngest students. Parents are also being urged to take their children's temperature each morning when the country begins its staggered returns next week. In Paris, schools will be able to accommodate just 15 percent of students, Mayor Anne Hidalgo said this week.

She and more than 300 other mayors in the greater Paris region have called to push back the returns, echoing worries in other countries keeping most schools shut for now. Italy and Spain, hit hard by the coronavirus, have cancelled class until September, as have Bulgaria, Ireland, Portugal, Tunisia, and the state of New York. In China's Wuhan, where

the outbreak erupted in December, students began returning to class only this week, wearing masks and walking in single file past thermal scanners, after being shut out since January.

'Immense effort'

At the height of the crisis, an estimated 1.5 billion learners from kindergarten to university were stuck at home in 195 countries, a number that stood at 1.3 billion as of May 7, the UN education agency UNESCO said. It has warned the lockdowns could further widen education gaps between rich and poor since half the world's students lack access to computers for home schooling.

"The decision on when and how to reopen schools is far from simple," UN chief Audrey Azoulay said this week. "But as numerous students fall behind in their learning... reopening must be a priority," she said. Even in developed countries, officials are racing for students to have at least a few weeks in the classroom before the summer break, a tacit admission that "distance learning" cannot make up for the educational deficit from two months or more of home confinement.

"It's not bad that they do it in this way," said Alice Laval, a French teacher in Vienna who agreed home schooling had increased disparities between students with good support networks and those without. "At first it will be all about checking how the kids are doing," she said of the return. Laval said preparing Austrian schools for the strict sanitary rules, dividing classes and reworking schedules, had been "an immense effort."

Other teachers have been less sanguine, many taking to social media to mock decrees such as cleaning every crayon before it is shared, or making sure five-year-olds respect a safe social distance of one metre from their classmates. "It's broadly accepted that this pandemic is far from under control, and everyone is worried about a second wave" of cases, France's FSU teachers' union said in a statement. "As of now, there is no guarantee that the conditions for health safety will be met in France for public servants, children or their families by May 11," it said. — AFP

International

Despite lockdown, no letup the murder rate in Chicago

56 murdered despite statewide stay-at-home orders

CHICAGO: The streets of Chicago may be largely empty as residents hunker down from coronavirus but some of the city's most deprived neighborhoods are still echoing to the sound of deadly gunfire and raucous partying. While significant falls in crime have been one of the few positive side effects of lockdowns in much of the United States and elsewhere, they have barely made a dent in the homicide rate in Chicago, a city that has long recorded the most murders in the country.

Chicago police say 56 murders were committed in April despite statewide stay-at-home orders—only a fraction lower than the 61 for the same month in 2019

— while last weekend, the first of the new month, four people were killed and 46 others shot and wounded. New York by contrast, a city with a population almost three times that of Chicago, saw 31 homicides in April. Los Angeles, the second biggest city in the US, saw just 18 murders over a four-week period from late March.

Twenty-one of the weekend's victims were shot in a seven-hour period from Saturday night to Sunday, including five teenagers wounded in a drive-by shooting at a party on the city's West Side. Reports said the shooting came hours after officers enforcing the statewide stay-at-home order broke up another party in the same block.

The West Side has some of the city's most crime-

ridden neighborhoods and hundreds of people filled the streets there overnight Saturday into Sunday as revelers partied in defiance of stay-at-home orders. Mayor Lori Lightfoot had earlier warned any potential partygoers or hosts that they would face arrest. "We are not playing games," the mayor said at a Saturday news conference. "We will shut you down, and if we need to, we will arrest you and take you to jail, period." That didn't stop crowds gathering on the streets to dance to loud music, with little sign of social distancing or face masks.

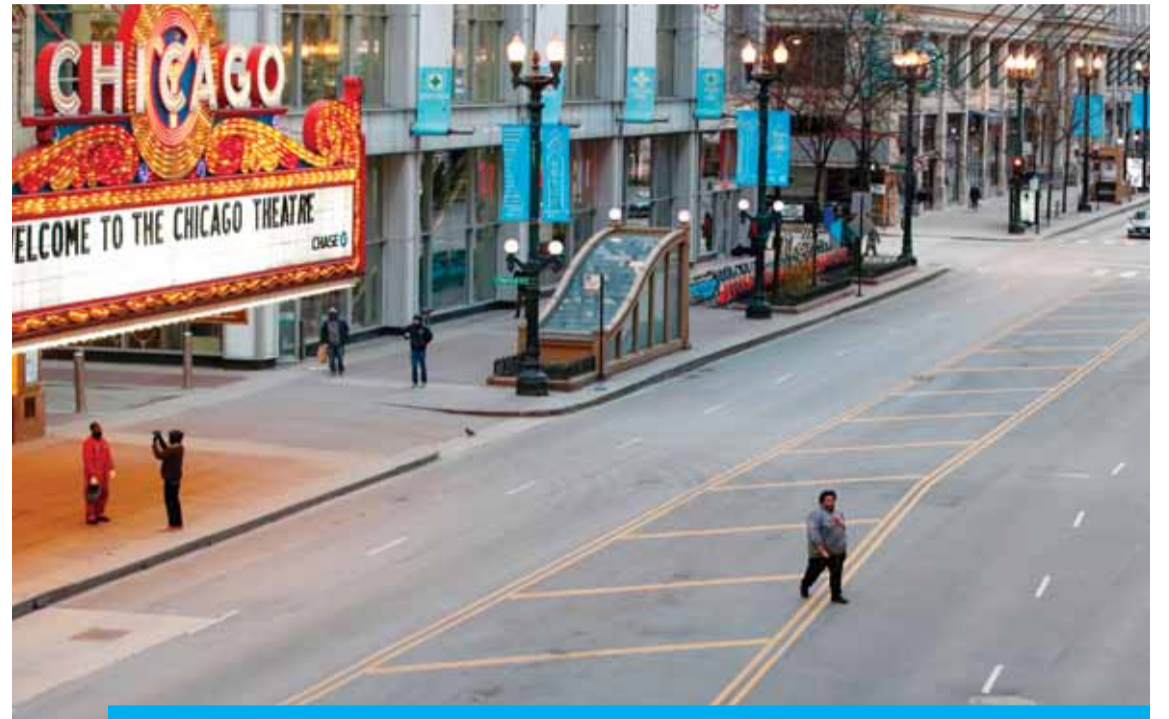


Mayor warns partygoers and hosts

'Horrible' segregation

Video posted on social media showed partygoers knocking back alcohol and dancing on cars as police looked on. While officers did break up the parties, no charges were brought. Chicago police told AFP that they would not "speculate whether or not victims/offenders are abiding by the stay-at-home mandate."

But Father Michael Pfleger, an activist priest who has worked in Chicago for more than 30 years, said respect for the authorities was limited in the city's poorer neighborhoods which have an overwhelming concentration of African-Americans. "I think one of the reasons is that Chicago is more segregated than New York and LA," Pfleger said. "Segregation here is horrible. You have segregated communities on the South and the West sides that you don't have in



CHICAGO: A man crosses a nearly empty State Street on March 21, 2020. — AFP

other cities. I also think that decades of ignoring these segregated communities hasn't helped."

Pfleger argued that someone who was prepared to commit murder was unlikely to be too bothered about observing a stay-at-home order. Max Kapustin, senior research director at the University

of Chicago Crime Lab, said most of the shootings and murders have occurred outdoors and both shooters and victims have ignored stay-at-home orders. "We don't know if there's anything else related to COVID-19 that may be exacerbating the issue," he said. — AFP

Killing of black jogger sparks protest in US

WASHINGTON: Authorities in the southern US state of Georgia said Friday they had "more than sufficient probable cause" to charge two white men over the killing of an unarmed black jogger, but did not explain why it took 74 days for the suspects to be detained. Gregory McMichael, 64, and his son Travis, 34, were arrested late Thursday and charged with murder and aggravated assault in the February 23 death of 25-year-old Ahmaud Arbery.

Arbery's death in the coastal city of Brunswick, captured in a video that has gone viral, was the latest killing of an unarmed black American, galvanizing activists who say the death highlights deeply rooted racism in the country. Hundreds of demonstrators, their faces covered in masks to protect them from the coronavirus, gathered in front of the city's courthouse on Friday to demand justice for Arbery.

President Donald Trump said he had seen the video and called it "very, very disturbing." "That looks like a really good, young guy... It's a very disturbing situation to me, and I just — you know, my heart goes out to the parents and the family and the friends," he told Fox News in an interview. Vic Reynolds, director of the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, told a news conference that "there is more than sufficient probable cause in this case for felony murder."

Reynolds declined to explicitly criticize local police who initially investigated the case in the two months after Arbery was killed, but admitted "there were things that needed to be done and have been done yesterday." "Considering the fact that we hit the ground running Wednesday morning and within 36 hours we had secured warrants for two individuals for murder — I think that speaks volumes in itself," he said. He added that the investigation was ongoing and there could be more arrests.

Viral video

Gregory and Travis McMichael were arrested two days after the release of a video showing Arbery being gunned down in the middle of a road in broad daylight. In the footage, Arbery is seen running down a residential street and approaching a white pickup truck stopped in the right lane with a man standing in the back. As Arbery tries to get around the vehicle, he is confronted by a second man holding a shotgun. An altercation between the two ensues and three shots can be heard. The man who filmed the clip that caught the nation's attention has also been named as a person of interest in the investigation. Reynolds said the investigation would focus exclusively on the killing — and not the reasons why local authorities were so slow to act. — AFP



These booking photos show Gregory McMichael (left) and his son Travis McMichael. — AFP

Trump savors 'witch hunt' vindication

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump claimed sweeping vindication Friday over the Russian election meddling investigation that he has long branded a hoax and a witch hunt, after the Justice Department dropped its prosecution of his former national security advisor Michael Flynn. Attorney General Bill Barr's deeply controversial declaration that there were never grounds to pursue Flynn, a central target in the Russia investigation, and that the FBI abused its powers, drew outrage across much of the legal community.

But it delivered to Trump a powerful victory in his three-year campaign to convince Americans that the probe was a political inquisition designed to delegitimize his presidency. "Most people knew from the beginning, and they knew it was just a total hoax. It was a made-up story, a disgrace to our nation," Trump told Fox News. "They tried to take down the President of the United States, a sitting, duly elected President of the United States before I even won," he said.

Ammunition against Biden

Coming six months before he stands for reelection,



Michael Flynn

in the not too distant future," Trump said of all those involved in the Russia probe. "If anyone thinks that (Obama) and Sleepy Joe Biden didn't know what was going on, they have another thing coming" he said. "I believe he and Biden... (were) involved in this all, very much."

Secret Russia talks

By closing the case on Flynn, Barr was plunging a knife into the heart of the justification for Special Counsel Robert Mueller's investigation into alleged Trump campaign collusion with Russia. When completed, Mueller detailed numerous contacts between the Trump campaign and Russia which suggested collusion but did not add up to a crime. Mueller's probe, which led to convictions or guilty pleas by five other Trump associates, had cast a cloud over Trump's 2016 upset election victory and

riveted the nation for two years. Mueller detailed nearly a dozen acts of alleged obstruction by Trump, but his report neither exonerated the president nor concluded he had committed a crime. But Barr, who was appointed attorney general in 2018 after supplying legal arguments to the White House against the Mueller investigation, declared that Mueller found no actionable wrongdoing. By then, though, Flynn had already pleaded guilty to one count of lying to the FBI over his Russia contacts, and was facing sentencing.

The court had heard substantial evidence about his secret talks in December 2016 with Russia's envoy to Washington to discuss deals that would undermine then-president Obama's policy toward Moscow. Yet in a nearly unheard-of reversal, on Thursday the Justice Department told the federal district court in Washington that Flynn's guilty plea was moot, because the investigation was not justified to begin with. "Our duty we think, is to dismiss the case," Barr told CBS News. "A crime cannot be established here. They did not have a basis for the counterintelligence investigation against Flynn."

Despite the evidence amassed by US intelligence and Mueller, Trump never accepted that Russia interfered to help him in 2016 and that he or his staff should have been investigated. "You look at Mueller, that was purely corrupt," Trump said of the special counsel, a former FBI director. Trump declared victory on Friday, as he did earlier this year following his Senate acquittal after being impeached on separate charges related to Ukraine. Barr, however, took heavy criticism. — AFP

Venezuela charges two Americans with terrorism, conspiracy

CARACAS: Venezuela has charged two former US soldiers with terrorism and conspiracy for allegedly taking part in a failed bid to topple President Nicolas Maduro, the attorney general said on Friday. Luke Alexander Denman, 34, and Airan Berry, 41, were among 17 people captured by the Venezuelan military, which said it had thwarted an attempted invasion by mercenaries in the early hours of Sunday.

Attorney General Tarek William Saab said they had been charged with "terrorism, conspiracy, illicit trafficking of weapons of war and (criminal) association," and could face 25-30 years in prison. Eight attackers were reportedly killed in the incident. Saab said Venezuela had requested an international arrest warrant for the capture of former US army medic Jordan Goudreau, who allegedly organized and trained the mercenary force.

Maduro has accused President Donald Trump of being behind the alleged invasion and Saab said Friday the Venezuelans involved would be tried for "conspiracy with a foreign government." Trump has roundly rejected the accusation, telling Fox News on Friday: "If I wanted to go into Venezuela I wouldn't make a secret about it." "I'd go in and they would do nothing about it. They would roll over. I wouldn't send a small little group. No, no, no. It would be called an army," he said. "It would be called an invasion."

Venezuela said on Monday it had arrested the two former US special forces soldiers and on Wednesday Maduro, who showed the pair's passports on state television, said they would be tried. The US army has confirmed they were former members of the Green Berets who were deployed to Iraq. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the US government would "use every tool that we have available to try to get them back."

Bay of Pigs 'remake'

Maduro described the raid as a "remake" of the failed 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion, when Cuban exiles



CARACAS: Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro shows the passports of two US citizens arrested by security forces during a video conference meeting with international media correspondents at Miraflores Presidential Palace on May 6, 2020. — AFP

covertly financed and directed by the US government attempted to overthrow then Cuba leader Fidel Castro. Announcing the arrests, Saab said Venezuela's opposition leader Juan Guaido, who is backed in his challenge to Maduro's authority by the United States and more than 50 other countries, was behind the mission. Saab accused Guaido of signing a \$212 million contract with "hired mercenaries" using funds seized by the US from the state oil company PDVSA.

On Friday the attorney general said arrest warrants had also been requested for US-based Venezuelans Juan Jose Rendon and Sergio Vergara. Rendon, an advisor to Guaido, admitted in an interview with CNN that he had signed a contract with Silvercorp USA, a private security firm founded by Goudreau. The Iraq and Afghanistan veteran admitted the existence of the operation in a video and claimed Silvercorp was contracted by Venezuela's opposition. In the video, Goudreau showed what he claimed was a contract signed by Guaido, whose press team denied the allegation. He also told The Washington Post that he hired Denman and Berry as "supervisors" and had known them for years. Rendon told CNN the contract was "exploratory" and that no green light was given to an operation in Venezuela. He also denied Guaido was involved. Despite the Venezuela regime's accusations against Guaido, he has not been charged with anything. — AFP

COVID-19: Pence spokeswoman tests positive

WASHINGTON: The US vice president's spokeswoman became the second White House staffer this week to test positive for the coronavirus, officials said Friday, even as President Donald Trump continued to go mask-free at a World War II commemoration with veterans in their 90s.

News that staffer Katie Miller had fallen ill boosted fears that the White House is at risk of becoming a viral hot spot just when Trump is leading efforts to wind down nationwide quarantine measures that have devastated the world's biggest economy. Miller is spokeswoman for Vice President Mike Pence, giving her frequent access to high-level meetings. She is also married to top Trump aide Stephen Miller, the speech writer behind the administration's hardline immigration measures.

A senior administration official initially said only that a member of Pence's staff had been tested and found to have the coronavirus. Trump, speaking later at an event with Republican lawmakers, identified the person as "Katie," saying she works with Pence as a "press person." This confirmed multiple US media reports that Katie Miller was the person in question.

On Friday, Miller thanked people for their well wishes, and in a tweet said: "I'm doing well and look forward to getting back to work for the American people." As recently as Thursday, Miller was seen mingling with officials at an outdoor prayer ceremony hosted by Trump and attended by dozens of people, including the wives of Trump and Pence and many senior staff.

Miller's positive test disrupted a trip by Pence to Des Moines, Iowa, with six people who may have had contact with her made to get off the airplane. "Out of abundance of caution we went back and looked into all the person's contacts most recently," said the senior administration official, who asked not to be named. On Thursday, a Trump spokesman said the president's valet, a member of the military who is in close contact with the president, had tested positive. — AFP

International

Drones disinfect pandemic hotspot city after clashes

Warship evacuates stranded Indians from Maldives

AHMEDABAD: Drones hovered over the pandemic-stricken Indian city of Ahmedabad yesterday spraying disinfectant on the streets, hours after security forces clashed with residents who flouted a toughened lockdown. The western city of 5.5 million people has become a major concern for authorities as they battle a surge in coronavirus deaths and cases across India.

Ahmedabad accounts for 343 of the almost 2,000 deaths reported nationwide and just under ten percent of cases registered. Other cities in Gujarat state have also been badly hit. Drones sprayed from the air while fire engines and other city vehicles toured the empty streets sending out clouds of cleaning agent onto roads and the outside of buildings. "We have started a massive exercise to spray disinfectant in all zones of the city," said the city's acting chief administrator Rajiv Gupta.

India has been in the grip of the world's biggest lockdown since March 25, which was made stricter in Ahmedabad on Friday because of the accelerated spread of the virus. Hundreds of paramilitaries kept people off the streets and virtually all stores have been closed for at least a week. On Friday night, security forces fired tear gas at stone-throwing residents who ventured out. At least 15 people were arrested and the police presence was stepped up yesterday.

Authorities have insisted the pandemic crisis is under control and have started to ease restrictions in many parts of India to let agriculture and some companies get back to work. Experts however have warned of an increasing toll despite the lockdown. The virus is spreading particularly quickly in major cities such as Mumbai, New Delhi and Ahmedabad. And experts say the toll numbers are higher than reported because of the lack of testing and poor accounting for deaths.

While the number of deaths is low compared to the United States and the worst-hit European nations,

health specialists say India's pandemic curve may only peak in June and July. Shamika Ravi, an economic advisor to the government who has become a much-followed commentator on the pandemic's spread, said yesterday that the "infection is way ahead of our knowledge" in Gujarat and Maharashtra, which includes Mumbai, because there is not enough testing.

Stranded Indians

In another development, India's navy on Friday began evacuating from the Maldives around 750 of the hundreds of thousands of Indian nationals stranded worldwide because of coronavirus. The operation by two warships in Male forms part of an initial operation to repatriate almost 15,000 Indians from 12 countries where they have been stuck since India banned incoming flights in late March to halt the pandemic. On Thursday, the first two repatriation flights brought back 354 Indians from Abu Dhabi and Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. They then went into quarantine centres.

In the Maldives, around 4,000 of the 27,000 Indians living in the archipelago have registered to be taken home. On Friday the first batch of 750 underwent the emigration process before boarding the INS Jalashwa which will set sail for Kochi in the southern state of Kerala. Footage posted on Twitter by the Indian High Commission (embassy) showed how the naval vessel had been modified to accommodate civilians—complete with neat rows of bunk beds and chairs.

Each passenger is being charged \$40 for the service, the High Commission said. Satish Kumar, who lost his job in the Maldives in February, said he was looking forward to going home. "You look in any corner of Male, you can hear about a positive case. Male is very dense (and) the community spread is high," Kumar, 55, told AFP. "I'm very relieved that I'm leaving. I know I've lost my job but I just want to go back to my family."

India authorities battle a surge in COVID-19 deaths



Somalia's faithful undeterred even as virus spreads

MOGADISHU: Adan Abdullahi knows that visiting the mosque for evening prayers is forbidden. There is a curfew in place in the Somali capital, and authorities have pleaded with worshippers to stay home as coronavirus infections rise. But it is the holy month of Ramadan—one coinciding with a deadly outbreak that has officially claimed 39 lives but likely hundreds more in under-resourced Somalia—and Abdullahi can think of no better time for faith, so he refuses to follow the rule. "When disaster strikes, you go to the mosque and pray so that Allah solves your predicament," the 42-year-old father-of three told AFP in Mogadishu.

But elsewhere in the city, as containment measures are ignored or half-heartedly enforced, graves are furiously being dug to accommodate a spike in unexplained deaths. Known cases of coronavirus have jumped 14-fold since mid-April to 873 but government officials suspect the true toll is vastly higher due to a lack of testing. "We lack sufficient testing capabilities for people who are sick" and the doctors, nurses and medical personnel to man the hospitals and labs, said Mogadishu mayor Omar Mohamud.

Humanitarian agencies fear the fragile state, already confronting an armed insurgency, a record locust invasion and heavy flooding, will not cope should the virus spiral further. "We are seeing widespread community transmission in a country that will not be able to handle a multitude of severely ill patients at once," said Richard Crothers, country director for the International Rescue Committee.

People with COVID-19 symptoms were being told to stay home to free up what scant hospital resources are available for the seriously ill, further suggesting the official count was off, Crothers added. The World Health Organization warned on April 23 that unless the rate of transmission slowed rapidly, Somalia's parlous health care system would quickly be swamped.

'Nothing has changed'

Instead, the caseload has ballooned as the government has struggled to convince people of the seriousness of the disease sweeping the globe, and the need to stay home and avoid large gatherings. Streets, markets and mosques are bustling in Mogadishu, weeks after the first Somali tested positive for COVID-19.

Police on patrol use megaphones to urge bystanders to keep their distance, and posters in the streets carry government advice about the disease, but few pay attention. "Nothing's changed here. We can still visit others, and go anywhere we want," said Ali Moallim Nur, shrugging off the health advice on a Mogadishu street. A curfew has proved fruitless in the capital—especially so during Ramadan, a time when Somalis visit each other's homes in the evening to break their fast together, and pray even more than usual. —AFP

Earthquake sparks panic in Iran capital

TEHRAN: An earthquake struck early Friday near Iran's highest peak and jolted Tehran, killing at least one person and injuring more than 20 as people ran for their lives. The shallow 4.6 magnitude quake hit at 00:48 am near the city of Damavand, about 55 kilometers east of Tehran, the US Geological Survey said.

It saw scores of residents of Tehran flee buildings for the safety of the capital's streets and parks, AFP journalists reported. Many spent the rest of the night sleeping in their cars on the side of the road, apparently too fearful to return to their homes. Some wore face masks, a sign of the times in a country already struggling to contain the Middle East's deadliest outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic.

The tremor struck as Iranians were either sleeping or resting after iftar, the meal breaking the daytime fast observed by Muslims during the holy month of Ramadan. "We were sitting down when the earthquake struck," said 45-year-old Tehran resident Ahmad. "We felt it completely shaking (the building), and then we all went out of the house together to be outside and not to be in danger if an aftershock struck." His wife Maryam, who like him

End of an era: Bangladesh's last Armenian dies

DHAKA: Michael Joseph Martin, Bangladesh's last Armenian, has died aged 89, bringing an end to the more than 300-year presence of the once thriving and powerful minority Christian community. Martin spent decades as custodian of the Armenian Church of the Holy Resurrection which was founded in 1781 in what was once the heart of the Armenian community in Dhaka. Armen Arslanian, the church's warden who is based abroad, said Martin "was instrumental in maintaining the survival of the Armenian Church in Dhaka."

"Without the many personal sacrifices and complete devotion to the church, the premises and the history of the Armenians in Dhaka would not have survived today," he added as he announced Martin had died on April 11. The Bangladeshi capital was once home to hundreds of Armenians who first arrived in the 16th century and became major traders, lawyers and public officials in the city. Martin came to Dhaka in 1942 following in the footsteps of his father who had

settled in the region decades earlier. He was originally a trader. Martin—whose Armenian name was Mikael Husep Martirosian—went on to look after the church and its graveyard where 400 people are buried, including his wife who died in 2006. When their children left the country, Martin became the sole remaining Armenian in Dhaka and lived alone in a mansion in the church grounds. "When I walk, sometimes I feel spirits moving around. These are the spirits of my ancestors. They were noble men and women, now resting in peace," Martin told AFP in an interview published in January 2009.

Coronavirus crisis

Health ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour said on Twitter that the tremor claimed the life of one person. He called on people to "keep calm" and to follow safety guidelines. Iran's national emergency services said the person who died was a 60-year-old man in Damavand county.

Twenty-three people were injured in Tehran and Alborz provinces, a spokesman for the organisation told AFP. The Iranian Red Crescent said its staff were on standby but that so far there were no reports of any collapsed buildings in which to carry out search and rescue operations. "The situation is now stable, but we are still completely on alert" in the provinces of Tehran, Alborz, Mazandaran, Qom and Semnan, said Hamed Sajjadi, head of the organization's rescue operations. Six people were hospitalized, he told AFP.

"We were ready to accommodate people in stadiums with respect to social distancing, but it was not necessary," he said, referring to health guidelines aimed at stemming the spread of the coronavirus. The USGS said the quake struck at a depth of 10 kilometers. Its epicenter was south of Mount Damavand, a largely inactive volcano which at 5,671 meters (18,606 feet) is Iran's highest peak. Tehran

University's Seismological Centre said the quake had a magnitude of 5.1 magnitude and was at a depth of seven kilometers. It reported a series of aftershocks, the most powerful measuring 4.0.

Deadly history

Iran sits on top of major tectonic plates and experiences frequent seismic activity. A 5.7 magnitude earthquake that rattled the western village of Habash-e Olya on February 23 killed at least nine people over the border in neighboring Turkey. In November 2017, a 7.3-magnitude quake in Iran's western province of



TEHRAN: Iranians wearing masks against the coronavirus gather outside their buildings after a 5.1 earthquake was felt in the capital on May 7, 2020. —AFP

Kermanshah killed 620 people. In 2003, a 6.6-magnitude quake in southeastern Iran leveled the ancient mud-brick city of Bam and killed at least 31,000 people. Iran's deadliest quake was a 7.4-magnitude tremor in 1990 that killed 40,000 people in northern Iran, injured 300,000 and left half a million homeless. In December and January, two earthquakes struck near Iran's Bushehr nuclear power plant. Iran's Gulf Arab neighbors have raised concerns about the reliability of the country's sole nuclear power facility, and the risk of radioactive leaks in case of a major earthquake. —AFP

14 migrants killed by train in India

MUMBAI: Fourteen migrant laborers walking back to their villages after being left destitute by India's strict coronavirus lockdown were killed Friday after being hit by a train, officials said. The men were returning home when they were hit by the goods train in the western state of Maharashtra, police official SS Sutale told AFP.

They were among millions of migrant workers who have been left unemployed, officials said, after Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a national lockdown in March, sparking an exodus from major cities. Hours after the incident, the Indian rail ministry tweeted that the train driver braked after seeing the men, but was unable to stop in time. Three others were injured and taken to hospital, the ministry said, announcing an inquiry.



AHMEDABAD, India: Stranded migrant workers intending to go to their hometowns leave Gota Bridge area as Gujarat police personnel (unseen) shove them away during a government-imposed nationwide lockdown on Friday. —AFP

'Massive task'

Maldives has reported 642 virus cases with two deaths so far. India's coronavirus lockdown, one of the world's strictest, left vast numbers of workers, students and tourists stranded. The lockdown has been steadily eased but there are still no scheduled flights.

India's coronavirus cases passed 50,000 this week with 1,886 deaths as of Friday, with recent days having seen record jumps. Another warship is due to pick up more Indians in the UAE-home to a 3.3-million-strong Indian community which makes up about 30 percent of the Gulf state's population. The consulate in Dubai said it had received almost 200,000 applications, appealing on Twitter for "patience and

cooperation" as India undertakes the "massive task" of repatriation.

The novel coronavirus and its devastating economic impact have left many workers in the region sick and others unemployed, unpaid and at the mercy of sometimes unscrupulous employers. Other special flights were due to leave Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines, as well as London, San Francisco, New York, Chicago and Washington. Around 1,000 Indians were scheduled to arrive in India on Friday from Dhaka, Singapore, Riyadh, Manama and Dubai. Some of the citizens have complained about delays in evacuation triggered by the need to test crew, as well as the move to charge for repatriation. —Agencies

Business

SUNDAY, MAY 10, 2020

10 Uber losses widen but appetite grows for Eats**11** China, US 'commit to' implement trade deal**11** Working women hit hard by coronavirus downturn

Uber



ARLINGTON: In this photo illustration, a COVID-19 Unemployment Assistance Updates logo is displayed on a smartphone on top of an application for unemployment benefits. With shops and factories closed nationwide due to the coronavirus pandemic, nearly all of the jobs created in the US economy in the last decade were wiped out in a single month. — AFP

Pandemic fuels historic job losses

US suffers biggest job losses in history amid coronavirus

WASHINGTON: The United States has recorded its steepest job losses in history over the coronavirus pandemic as Europe moved to keep its borders shut for another month. Hopes have been rising that the worst of the global catastrophe, which has killed more than 270,000 people, has passed, and the United States on Friday approved a new at-home saliva test to speed up diagnosis for COVID-19.

But after weeks in which half of humanity was restricted from carrying on normal life, the effects have been painfully visible, with the global economy suffering its most acute downturn in nearly a century. In the United States, 20.5 million jobs were wiped out in April—the most ever reported—with unemployment rising to 14.7 percent, the highest since the Great Depression.

The world's largest economy has suffered the deadliest coronavirus outbreak, with more than 77,000 fatalities and nearly 1.3 million cases. Mindful of elections in November, President Donald Trump has nonetheless vowed to reopen the country, and a growing number of state governors have already let business resume with precautions. Trump played down the unemployment numbers, as the White House pointed to substantial gains Friday on global stock markets as proof that better times were ahead. "We're going to have a phenomenal

year next year," Trump told reporters. "I think it's going to come back blazing." His optimism came even as the virus spread within the White House, with the press secretary of Vice President Mike Pence testing positive. Neighboring Canada also

shed three million jobs, bringing its unemployment rate up to 13.1 percent, two days after the European Union forecast a massive recession in the bloc.



EU wants borders kept shut

Still 'fragile'

A number of governments are moving to ease restrictions. Germany, Europe's biggest economy, took decisive early action that stemmed the virus and Chancellor Angela Merkel plans an almost complete

return to normal within the month. Italy, where deaths on Friday passed 30,000, plans to allow worshippers to return to church, while Denmark said cinemas, museums and zoos would reopen on June 8.

Pakistan was due to begin easing its nationwide lockdown on Saturday even as cases continued to rise, citing economic havoc that the measures have wreaked. In Britain, which has suffered the world's highest death toll after the United States, Prime Minister Boris Johnson is expected to offer a roadmap out of lockdown on Sunday. The European Commission recommended that the 27-nation bloc keep banning non-essential entry of visitors until June 15, an extension of one month.

"The situation remains fragile both in Europe and in the world," it said in a statement. The virus that has infected 3.9 million people worldwide overshadowed one of the most important dates on the European calendar—the anniversary of the end of World War II on the continent. Parades and commemorations to mark 75 years since Nazi Germany's surrender were canceled or scaled down, and the thoughts of many national leaders were on fighting the new global challenge.

"We want more, not less, cooperation in the world—also in the fight against the pandemic," German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier said.

Russia, which marks the occasion a day later than western Europe, was on Saturday preparing for muted celebrations after becoming Europe's hotspot in the coronavirus pandemic. A Red Square parade has been postponed and President Vladimir Putin will instead give a 20-minute speech at a war memorial inside the Kremlin walls.

Far from bringing the world together, the crisis has triggered a war of words between China, where the virus first appeared in the metropolis of Wuhan, and the United States, where Trump has battled criticism over his handling of an epidemic which he boasted of having under control in January. The Trump administration has brought into the mainstream a theory that the virus came from a Wuhan laboratory, despite the World Health Organization and the top US epidemiologist saying there is no evidence.

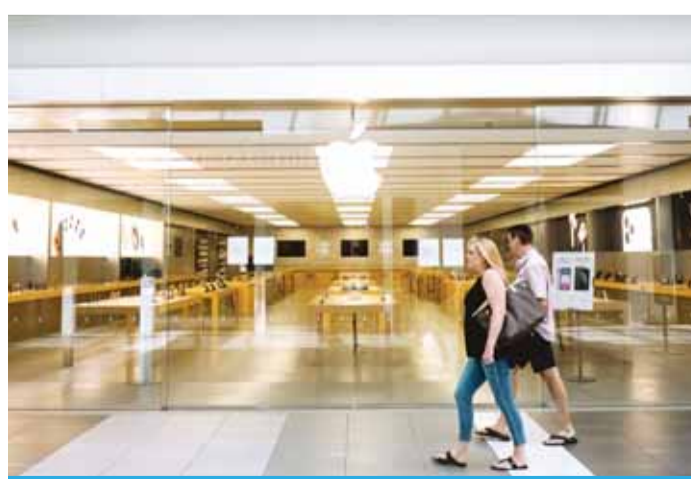
China rejects the charge, and America's allies are not convinced. The feud spread Friday to the UN Security Council, where the United States, stunning other members, prevented a vote on a resolution that called for a ceasefire in various conflicts around the world. The resolution, led by France and Tunisia, called for a cessation of hostilities in conflict zones and a 90-day "humanitarian pause" to allow governments to better address the pandemic among those suffering most. — AFP

Apple unveils plans to reopen some US stores

SAN FRANCISCO: Apple said it will begin gradually reopening its retail shops in the US next week, taking pandemic precautions such as making sure everyone in them wears masks. The iPhone maker planned to start with some stores in Alabama, Alaska, Idaho and South Carolina. "We've missed our customers and look forward to offering our support," Apple said in a statement to AFP.

"We'll open initially with additional safety procedures including temperature checks, social distancing and face coverings to ensure customers and employees continue to stay healthy." Apple's home state of California still has tight shelter-in-place rules but moved this week to let some business and industries get back in action provided they defend against spread of the coronavirus. Apple said it is monitoring health data and government guidance to determine when and where it can safely reopen shops.

New protocols in Apple stores will include limiting the number of customers who can be inside, meaning probable delays



FRANKLIN: Shoppers walk past a closed Apple store at the CoolSprings Galleria in Franklin, Tennessee. — AFP

for those who spontaneously stop by for technical help from a "Genius Bar." Apple recommended people order online for delivery or in-store pickup to limit personal contact. The move by Apple comes with several US states moving to end or ease lockdowns but with polls indicating many Americans remain cautious about resuming normal activities. — AFP

'No rush' for relief bill despite dire US jobless numbers

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump said Friday he was in "no rush" to strike a deal with Democrats over emergency relief for suffering Americans even as the raging coronavirus pandemic causes staggering job losses. Democrats led by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said they are crafting what could become another trillion-dollar-plus rescue package potentially including funding for state and local governments, paycheck protections and rent or mortgage assistance. Pelosi signaled that her "bold CARES 2 package" could soon get a vote if the House of Representatives returns to regular session next week. The president appeared to wave off the urgency.

"We're in no rush," Trump said at a roundtable with Republican lawmakers when asked about speeding up negotiations given the staggering 14.7 percent unemployment figure released Friday. Trump said he wanted to see what Democrats were proposing in the draft bill, adding that the administration "got what we needed" in previous rescue packages. Congress in March passed an unprecedented \$2.2 trillion rescue, triggering the distribution of checks to millions of families. The package pumped \$349 billion into a loan program to salvage small businesses and directed \$150 billion to state and local governments. — AFP

Business

Uber losses widen but appetite grows for Eats

Pandemic bites hard into ridesharing

SAN FRANCISCO: Uber said its losses widened in the first quarter as the pandemic bit hard into ridesharing but that it saw signs of recovery and a booming appetite for its Eats meal delivery helping it through the crisis. The San Francisco-based company said ride bookings were up eight percent over the first three months of the year despite the lockdowns that began in the final weeks of the quarter.

Data from April suggests a massive impact from the COVID-19 outbreak but also some indications of a rebound in some markets, chief executive Dara Khosrowshahi said. "I won't sugarcoat it - COVID-19 has had a dramatic impact on Rides with business down globally around 80 percent in April... but there's some green shoots driving restrained optimism," he told analysts. Khosrowshahi said Uber was seeing a "fourth consecutive week of growth" with bookings up 12 percent last week.

The comments by the CEO sparked a rally in after-hours trade, lifting Uber shares some six percent. Uber reported 53 percent revenue growth in its Eats restaurant take-away delivery service, as more people ordered in to avoid the coronavirus. Eats revenues rose to \$819 million, about one-third of the total for Uber in the quarter. "There's been a tremendous increase in restaurant sign-ups," said Khosrowshahi. "We believe these trends are here to stay."

With a network of app-summoned drivers, Uber is positioned to expand into delivering groceries, medicine, retail purchases and more with minimal investment, Khosrowshahi added. The net loss of \$2.9 billion in the quarter was nearly triple the level of a year earlier and included massive write-downs of the value of some of its assets — which compa-

nies are required to count as losses under accounting rules. Gross bookings were up eight percent from a year ago to \$15.7 billion, with revenues to the company rising 14 percent to \$3.5 billion.

Riding out the crisis

Uber has said it has ample cash on hand to ride out the coronavirus pandemic, which has forced billions of people to remain at home. "Our ample liquidity provides us with substantial flexibility to navigate the current crisis," said chief financial officer Nelson Chai. Uber has been tightening its belt with moves including the layoff of some 14 percent of its workforce.

It said earlier Thursday it was leading a \$170 million investment in Lime as part of a plan to merge its Jump electric bike and scooter operations into the rival service. The tie-up will free Uber to concentrate on its core rideshare and delivery services while Lime — which operates in some two dozen countries — will manage scooters and bikes including the Uber Jump fleet. "The reality is the world has changed, so we don't know when the recovery is going to be," Khosrowshahi said.

"We are going to take the actions that we think are necessary...there's no sacred cow and so we are going to look at everything," Uber and other "sharing economy" services are expected to feel a massive impact from the coronavirus outbreak which has dampened economic activity and made travelers more cautious. Rival rideshare platform Lyft this week reported a loss of \$398 million, narrower than a year ago, as revenues increased to \$956 million.

The two firms listed shares last year with an eye toward long-term profitability, goals which have



LOS ANGELES: A protester displays a sign as Uber and Lyft drivers with Rideshare Drivers United and the Transport Workers Union of America prepare to conduct a caravan protest outside the California Labor Commissioner's office amidst the coronavirus pandemic in Los Angeles, California. —AFP

become more elusive in the current environment. "On the other side of this dark valley, the Uber business model will likely look a lot different for the next few years (at least) and the company must rationalize costs and a smaller operation to focus on attaining profitability in this 'new normal' backdrop," said Daniel Ives of Wedbush Securities in a research note.

"On the ride sharing front, Uber and Lyft face

Herculean-like challenges looking ahead as the new reality will likely change the business models of these companies (and competitors) for the foreseeable future." Uber faces a range of regulatory issues around the world as it seeks to disrupt personal transportation. California this week sued both Uber and Lyft alleging they violated a state law by classifying drivers as contractors instead of employees. —AFP



Eats revenues rise to \$819 m

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Finland needs painful spending cuts after coronavirus crisis

HELSINKI: Finland's government will have to implement a "pain package" of tax rises and spending cuts worth billions of euros to rebalance its finances after the coronavirus crisis, a group of leading economists warned on Friday. In a government-commissioned report, four of the Nordic country's best-known economic thinkers warned of a "lost decade" of growth and a deep recession sparked by the economic standstill of the coronavirus crisis.

"The corona crisis will impoverish Finland and significantly weaken the balance of Finnish public finances in the medium term," the authors, led by professor Vesa Vihriala, said in a statement. The report warned that spending cuts, tax hikes and structural changes, worth at least 3-4 percent of GDP, will be needed to address the shortfalls. "This will most likely be sufficient to keep the debt-to-GDP ratio below 90 percent during the 2020s," the report said.

The prospect of further cuts to public finances is likely to be unwelcome to Finland's centre-left coalition, whose leading Social Democrat party won last year's election on a platform of opposition to the previous five years of austerity. Receiving the report on Friday, the finance ministry's top civil servant, Martti Hetemäki, acknowledged that "being gloomy is being realistic," and said that difficult decisions "cannot be left for tomorrow." In the immediate term the report called for the safe lifting of restrictions in order to try and restore confidence in the market. —AFP

Brazil auto production crumbles, down 99%

SAO PAULO: Auto production in Brazil crumbled in April under the weight of the coronavirus crisis, falling a catastrophic 99 percent, the carmakers' association said Friday. Only 1,847 vehicles were produced in the country's 65 auto factories, as compared with 189,958 made in March, the association said in a statement. In April a year ago, automakers in Brazil produced 267,562 vehicles. Last month's paltry total was the smallest for a full month since 1957, the group said. April was the first full month that Brazil was under anti-virus lockdown measures designed to curb the spread of the contagion.

Brazil is the epicenter of the outbreak in Latin America, with more than 145,000 cases and nearly 10,000 deaths. But auto production in Brazil had already suffered in previous months, as the global pandemic paralyzed the world economy and the country started taking precautions. From January through April, a total of 587,739 vehicles left the factories of the 26 automakers operating in Brazil, against 965,408 in the same period last year—a 39 percent drop.

"The major drop in production came along with an equally dramatic fall in sales in both the domestic market and exports," the association said. Exports dropped 79.3 percent year-on-year in April, with only 7,212 vehicles leaving the country. On Thursday, Brazil's Economy Minister Paulo Guedes warned that Latin America's biggest economy could face "economic collapse" in a month's time, with food shortages and "social disorder." —AFP

Los Angeles stores take tentative steps in reopening

LOS ANGELES: For Zohrab Mahdessian, owner of Jasmine's Garden flower shop in Los Angeles, the reopening of some stores in California on Friday couldn't have come at a better time—Sunday is Mother's Day in the US. "I'm happy to be back," he told AFP as he picked his order of roses, lilies, orchids and other blooms at the Flower District in downtown LA early Friday. "I'm feeling a bit rusty from having been shut down for seven weeks now... and hopefully I will be able to recover some of my losses this weekend," he added as he weaved his way through the crowded flower market.

Mahdessian's shop in LA's Los Feliz neighborhood is on a list of retailers allowed to get back to business in California as the state begins lifting a stay-at-home order imposed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Under the governor's plan, bookstores, music stores, florists, toy stores, clothing stores and a few others can reopen, but only for curbside pickup and barring any tougher restrictions at the local level. But despite the green light given by authorities, most retailers remained shuttered on Friday, while some, like Mahdessian, hoped for the best.

The 58-year-old said loyal customers—some of whom have become friends in the 20 years he has been open—have put in orders, but he was not sure that will be enough to help him survive the economic losses incurred from the virus-related shutdown. He usually gets upwards of 150 orders for Mother's Day, one of his biggest days of the year, but so far he has only gotten about 60. "We'll see after this weekend,"



LOS ANGELES: People shop and work at the Los Angeles Flower District, after the County allowed retail establishments to open on May 8, 2020. —AFP

he sighed, back in his small shop as he prepared bouquets. "If the business continues, I will stay open but if I'm down to half or a quarter of my normal business, then I have to consider other options."

Elsewhere throughout the county, including in Santa Monica and Venice, few people were seen out shopping, attesting to the difficulty in restarting an economy that has suffered billions of dollars in losses for a state that boasts the fifth-largest economy in the world. Downtown Santa Monica's Third Street Promenade, an open-air pedestrian shopping center

usually teeming with shoppers and tourists, looked like a ghost town with few people walking about.

"I'm not surprised it's not opening that fast," said Maggy, a local resident who did not want to share her last name. "It takes time for small shops to get prepared," she added, as she picked up a coffee near the Promenade. "And honestly, unless you really want something very specific or in a very specific shop, it's easier and safer to order online and have it delivered to your door. 'Why bother go out and pick it up on the curbside?'" —AFP

Empty Las Vegas Strip counts losses; locals venture out

LAS VEGAS: The marble statues at Caesars Palace are fenced off, the Venetian hotel's gondolas sit empty, and the New York-New York casino rollercoaster has ground to a halt. Even the Bellagio's famous dancing fountains are "completely shut" due to the coronavirus pandemic, says a surly security guard, before shoeing an AFP correspondent away. In the absence of bustling crowds of drunken revelers, packed poker tables and overzealous club promoters, the slogan "what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas" has never felt more redundant.

Last year, May was Las Vegas's second-busiest month, drawing nearly 3.7 million visitors. Now, the sidewalks lie empty under the scorching sun, except for idle security guards, and a handful of vagrants and bewildered-looking tourists. When the sun drops, some familiar flickers of activity return. The empty casinos' famous neon lights still shine out, illuminating the occasional low-riding sports car roaring down the Las Vegas Strip.

And local residents, from cycling families to skateboarding teens, are flocking to the vacant sidewalks in search of respite from

weeks of stay-at-home orders. "Being that I live in Las Vegas, I never come to the Strip. Ever. There's no need to," said automotive business owner Mike Evans, 47. "Being around drunk people and belligerent people is not relaxation," he added, pausing from his bike ride to take a selfie. Now even the outdoor escalators that usually transport pedestrians across traffic lanes stand still.

Angela Arnold, taking advantage of the lull to cycle to the "Welcome to Fabulous Las Vegas" sign with two fellow residents, added: "We're not going to hear horns blowing and people passing out vulgar advertising." Similarly, Luis Rosales, a 30-year-old server at the Venetian, has taken to rollerblading and jogging along the Strip. "I thought never in my life like I would see Las Vegas shut down," he said. "There's no commotion, there's no hustle and bustle... it's like a ghost town."

'Money and greed'

Beneath the odd sense of calm, the financial pain of the shutdown is clear. Billboards are plastered with adverts for nightclub launches that never happened — alongside uplifting messages to "Stay Strong." One budget hotel that has remained open on the Strip reports a few stir-crazy tourists visiting from neighboring California — and even as far away as Wisconsin. But more customers are long-term guests who have lost their Las Vegas homes during the lockdown — despite laws intended to prohibit evic-



LAS VEGAS: An empty Las Vegas Strip is seen amid the novel coronavirus pandemic. In the absence of bustling crowds of drunken revelers, packed poker tables and overzealous club promoters, the slogan 'what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas' has never felt more redundant. —AFP

tions. "We miss the noise... the great vibes, and people, and feeding off the happiness of other people," said Samantha, a former well-tipped cocktail waitress now serving chicken wings for minimum wage, who did not want to give her last name. She spoke with AFP while out for a walk with her mother Louisa, left unemployed as a poker dealer due to coronavirus.

There are nascent signs of the city start-

ing to reawaken. From Saturday, restaurants will be allowed to reopen at half capacity. But the tourist-magnet casinos and nightclubs — along with the state's strip joints and legal brothels — will remain shut, for now. "Since money is the root of all evil and Vegas is considered the capital of money and greed, this is the last place I thought I'd see shut down," said Evans. "But they still did." —AFP

Business

Working women hit hard by coronavirus downturn

Women account for 60% of the jobs lost

SOUTH CAROLINA: Before she was laid off from her bartending job in Charleston, South Carolina, Shana Swain used to spend her nights serving food and mixing Manhattans and Cosmopolitans. Now Swain, 40, spends her evenings having dinner with her girls, age 5 and 8, and studying for her real-estate license, which she hopes will provide more long-term stability for her family after the coronavirus crisis upended her livelihood.

many women of color, economists say. The roles are generally low-paying. Cashiers and bartenders each earn a median of \$11.40 an hour, and waitresses make a median \$11 per hour, according to data from the Labor Department - making it likely that workers had little savings to rely on during the crisis. In some parts of the country, these wages are much lower.

"Women who were employed in these sectors were already hanging on by a thread and many of them were single mothers or primary breadwinners for their family," said C Nicole Mason, president and chief executive of the Institute for Women's Policy. Swain said many of her regular customers, who nicknamed her "Shana Banana," texted her after the restaurant closed. She went to the supermarket to stock up, then blanched and froze vegetables to make them last longer. "I just know when it hits the fan you need to be ready," she said.



LOS ANGELES: People wait in line as they shop at the Los Angeles Flower District in downtown Los Angeles, California. Los Angeles County announced the very first steps in easing stay-at-home rules that have slowed the spread of coronavirus. — AFP

ing the pandemic, said Didem Tzemen, a senior economist at the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City who studied how workers were affected by the 2008-2009 financial crisis. During the last recession, women without a college education saw a steeper drop in labor force participation, Tzemen found.

Some people will get back to work over the next several months as states loosen the rules on social distancing and businesses reopen. But many businesses are likely to open in phases and with reduced staff, leaving jobs uncertain. "If they cannot find a job, they may leave the labor force," said Tzemen. The 11-year economic expansion was opening new doors for disadvantaged workers who previously struggled to get ahead, Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell said last month after the Fed's policy setting meeting. "It is heartbreaking, frankly, to see that all threatened now," he said.

Tina Watson returned to work last fall for the first

time in more than five years, taking a job as a cook for McDonald's in Holly Hill, South Carolina. In February, she changed jobs and went to Wendy's, which offered her a full-time schedule - up from three to four days a week - and \$8 an hour, up from \$7.25. For a little while, the single mother was able to pay her bills and save a bit of money for her and her 11-year-old son. But that period of stability was short lived.

Watson's schedule was cut to two days a week at the end of March, when Wendy's closed the dining room to comply with social distancing requirements. The smaller paycheck is not enough to cover her bills, and with schools closed, she is struggling to find reliable child care for her son. "I've always been struggling, but I feel like it's beginning to get worse," said Watson, who previously relied on her mother, who died last year, for financial help. "The little check that I have is nothing." — Reuters



COVID-19 wrecks economic havoc

"I can't be put in a position like this again," said Swain, a bartender for 20 years. American women are taking an outsized hit from the early wave of unemployment caused by the pandemic, due to the nature of the jobs that were lost in the business shutdowns to control the spread of the coronavirus. Women accounted for 60% of the jobs lost in March and 55% of the 20.5 million jobs shed in April, according to data released by the Labor Department on Friday.

The unemployment rate for adult women also rose sharply to 15.5% in April, above the unemployment rates of 13% for men and 14.7% for all workers. Women who are the sole or primary breadwinners in their families lost jobs at an especially fast clip, with their unemployment rate rising to 15.9% in April, compared to 13% for married women.

April's job losses were led by a decline of 7.7 million jobs in leisure and hospitality and 2.5 million jobs lost in health care and education - two consumer-facing industries dominated by women, including

Reversing gains
The crisis is threatening to undo gains women achieved in recent years, when more were entering the workforce and driving an increase in the overall labor force participation rate for people in the prime working ages of 25 and 54, economists say. Last December, women briefly made up the majority of the workforce for the first time since 2010, a milestone applauded as a benefit of the tight labor force and record economic expansion. Poverty rates for households headed by women, mostly single mothers, dropped to a historical low of 26.8% in 2018, Census data shows.

"Now, there's a clear dramatic shift where women are losing jobs at a rapid pace," said Mason. In April, the labor force participation rate for prime age working women dropped to 73.6%, declining more than the labor force participation rate for men. The gender participation gap widened, after reaching a new low in February.

Women without college degrees, a group that was disproportionately affected by the job losses in March, may struggle to recover the ground lost dur-



VIRGINIA: Laborers wait in a parking lot for day jobs, in Arlington, Virginia during the COVID-19 pandemic. — AFP

What is in American employment report?

WASHINGTON: The US employment report is a key government data release, closely watched for signs of the health of the economy. In April, the massive damage done by the coronavirus pandemic will become clear. The report is actually a compilation of two separate surveys, with many layers of detail about the US labor market beyond the two main headline figures: the unemployment rate and payroll figures. Here is a breakdown of the main components:

Households and businesses

The Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) uses two separate surveys each month to compile the report known officially as "The Employment Situation." Both surveys cover the week that includes the 12th day of the month, which in March was before many of the most strict coronavirus lockdowns went into effect.

The household survey gathers information on civilian employment status and details about age and gender from about 60,000 homes nationwide and comprises about 100,000 individuals, including self-employed people working on farms or in family businesses. The

establishment survey focuses on 145,000 businesses and government agencies to calculate nonfarm employment, hours worked and earnings by industry. The data are revised for two months after the initial release as more accurate and complete information is provided.

Unemployment rate

The unemployment rate, calculated from the household survey, is the percentage of people over 16 years old who are in the labor force but were not paid for work during the reference week, which includes the 12th of each month. To be in the labor force, a person must be working or unemployed but available for work and actively looking for a job within the prior four weeks. Someone who is retired or has stopped looking for work is not considered to be in the labor force. Workers who are furloughed or laid off due to the coronavirus are considered unemployed even if they continue to receive benefits like health insurance. An individual paid at least one hour is counted as employed, but someone with multiple jobs is only counted once in the household survey. — AFP

Lithuania's capital embraces al fresco dining

VILNIUS: Just over a week after open-air dining was allowed to resume in the Lithuanian capital, a public square named after a doctor and independence activist was hopping with diners at several dozen tables. "We missed this so much," said Elena Cerniauskiene, a 33-year-old bank worker out with her husband and their daughter in Jonas Basanavicius square. "It's like Christmas and New Year's Eve all at once," she told AFP on Friday.

As the Baltic country emerges from lockdown after recording a drop in coronavirus cases, the city of Vilnius hopes to become "one large outdoor cafe", mayor Remigijus Simasius has said. So far, the city has issued nearly 300 outdoor dining permits-around 100 more than in previous years-and made them free because of the pandemic, according to the mayor's office. It has also vowed to allow cafes and restaurants access to around 20 public spaces in the capital of the euro-zone country of 2.8 million people-although indoor dining is still banned.

Now "we can do around a quarter of the business we're used to", said Raimondas Pranka, head of the Lithuanian association of bars and

cafes. "It isn't much, but in March and April it was absolute zero," he told AFP. Piano Man Outside, one of the largest outdoor bars in the city centre, has posted government-issued virus safety guidelines at its entrance and has staff ensure that customers comply with social distancing rules.

Most of the customers observed by AFP on Friday had their face masks off, even when not drinking or eating. The bar's owner Saulius Galdikas said the decision to open outdoor cafes gave him "a big emotional boost", but added that he would be even happier if he could resume indoor seating at his other locations. "It's strange that shops, even shopping centers, are open, but cafes are not permitted to open, even with all the safety measures taken," he said.

The National Health Centre's Vilnius department said the decision to open outdoor cafes does not appear to have had any adverse effect on infection levels. "That's because the air outside moves quickly and circulates much better, while sunlight and higher temperatures have a significant impact as well," its head Rolanda Lingiene said. The Baltic state has registered 1,436 confirmed cases of the disease, including 49 deaths. — AFP



VILNIUS: People sit outside a cafe in Vilnius, Lithuania amidst the new coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic. — AFP

China, US commit to implement trade deal despite COVID-19 row

BEIJING: Chinese and US trade representatives agreed Friday to "create favorable conditions" for the phase one trade deal signed in January, officials said, despite recent tensions over the coronavirus pandemic. Vice Premier Liu He, who had led Beijing's negotiations, held a call in the morning with US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin.

"Both sides said they should strengthen macroeco-

nomics and public health cooperation, strive to create a favorable atmosphere and conditions for the implementation of the phase one US-China economic and trade agreement, promoting positive results," a notice from China's Ministry of Commerce said.

US officials said after the call that both parties agreed "good progress" is being made on creating the governmental infrastructures needed to make the agreement a success. "They also agreed that in spite of the current global health emergency, both countries fully expect to meet their obligations under the agreement in a timely manner," said the Office of the US Trade Representative and Treasury in a statement. The countries have also agreed to maintain communication and coordination.

The call is believed to be the first time they have officially spoken about the agreement since it was signed, and comes after both nations traded barbs

over the deadly virus. Last week, US President Donald Trump threatened new tariffs against China after claiming there was evidence linking COVID-19 to a top-security lab in the central city of Wuhan, where the pathogen first emerged late last year. China has denied the claims.

In January, Beijing agreed to import an additional \$200 billion in US products over two years, above the levels purchased in 2017, marking a truce in a bruising trade war that had hammered the global economy for almost two years. But analysts question if China will be able to fulfill the ambitious commitments after the virus outbreak brought business activity to a near halt earlier this year. Recovery has been slow since, and consumption has yet to bounce back to pre-virus levels.

China's imports plunged 14.2 percent in on-year in April, after a 0.9 percent dip the month before, even though the country has largely brought the coron-

avirus under control locally. Nick Marro of The Economist Intelligence Unit said that "shipments from the US remain well below the levels needed to achieve the purchase pledges under the trade accord". He added that the pandemic has disrupted supply and demand on both sides of the Pacific, highlighting risks around the survival of the deal. Although China's exports defied expectations to rise 3.5 percent in April, economists believe this is unlikely to last as figures were boosted by shipments of medical supplies against the global pandemic, as well as fulfilments of a backlog built up from a slow business resumption in the first quarter. Mnuchin said this week, however, that he expects China to uphold the deal signed this year, warning of "very significant consequences" if that did not happen. The US runs a trade deficit with China, and the objective has been to realign the trade balance between both countries. — AFP

Casinos become food banks as workers wait out COVID lockdown

LAS VEGAS: Michelle Manning pulled up at the Las Vegas casino around 2:30 am feeling confident. She and her sister were not planning to roll dice or play poker at the Palace Station, which like every gambling establishment in the desert city is shut due to coronavirus. Instead they arrived early enough to beat the six-mile line of cars that, each week, snakes around and out the sprawling parking lot, as people wait for the makeshift food bank to open. "We're able to have fruit, vegetables, meat, milk... and with the cash that I have available, I can pay my power bills," said Manning, who has an infant granddaughter and 92-year-old father waiting at home. "And this is safer than going to the grocery store."

A transport dispatcher whose children were laid off from jobs at the city's world-famous casinos, Manning was third in line of an anticipated 1,000 vehicles at the drive-through operation on Thursday. Each waited for crates of Wisconsin cheese, Washington state apples, chicken strips, potatoes and iced tea to be loaded into their open trunks. The site is one of 20 Las Vegas hubs run by Three Square, which sources food from federal government programs, as well as local donors and vendors.

The non-profit received a glut of discarded banquet food from Las Vegas casinos in March when they were suddenly ordered to shut their doors due to coronavirus. "They had sitting on their shelves, in their coolers and freezers, hundreds and hundreds of thousands of pounds of perishable food that we rescued over a matter of three or four days," said COO Larry Scott. But now that brief bonanza of meats and other premium foodstuffs has "completely stopped."

And many of those now waiting in line are the casinos' own former employees, laid off during the shutdown. Around one-third of southern Nevada's workforce is employed in hospitality, a sector especially ravaged by stay-at-home orders and travel bans. MGM Resorts, for instance, furloughed 63,000 staff. — AFP

Oceans may rise over a metre by 2100, five metres by 2300

IPCC tends to be very cautious and conservative

PARIS: Oceans are likely to rise as much as 1.3 metres by 2100 if Earth's surface warms another 3.5 degrees Celsius, scientists warned Friday. By 2300, when ice sheets covering West Antarctica and Greenland will have shed trillions of tonnes in mass, sea levels could go up by more than five metres under that temperature scenario, redrawing the planet's coastlines, they reported in a peer-reviewed survey of more than 100 leading experts.

About ten percent of the world's population, or 770 million people, today live on land less than five metres above the high tide line. Even if the Paris climate treaty goal of capping global warming below 2C is met — a very big "if" — the ocean watermark could go up two metres by 2300, according to a study in the journal Climate Atmospheric Science.

Earth's average surface temperature has risen just over one degree Celsius since the pre-industrial era, a widely used benchmark for measuring global warming. "It is clear now that previous sea-level rise estimates have been too low," co-author Stefan Rahmstorf, head of Earth system analysis at the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK), told AFP.

The new projections for both the 2100 and 2300 horizons are significantly higher than those from the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), including a special report on oceans it released in September.

"The IPCC tends to be very cautious and conservative, which is why it had to correct itself upwards already several times," Rahmstorf said.

Sea-level projections in the IPCC's landmark

2014 Assessment Report were 60 percent above those in the previous edition, he noted. A new Assessment will be finalised by the end of next year.

While less visible than climate-enhanced hurricanes or persistent drought, sea level rise may ultimately prove the most devastating of global warming impacts. Indeed, it is the extra centimetres of ocean water that make storm surges from ever-stronger tropical cyclones so much more deadly and destructive, experts say.

Benjamin Horton, acting chair of the Nanyang Technical University's Asian School of the Environment in Singapore, led the survey to give "policymakers an overview of the state of the science", a statement said.

Across the 20th century, sea level rise was caused mainly by melting glaciers and the expansion of ocean water as it warms. But over the last two decades the main driver has become the melting and disintegrating of Earth's two ice sheets.

Greenland and West Antarctica are shedding at least six times more ice today than during the 1990s. From 1992 through 2017 they lost some 6.4 trillion tonnes in mass.

Over the last decade, the sea level has gone up about four millimetres per year. Moving into the 22nd century, however, the waterline could rise ten times faster, even under an optimistic greenhouse gas emissions scenario, the IPCC has said.

The Greenland and West Antarctic ice sheets hold enough frozen water to lift oceans about 13 metres. East Antarctica, which is more stable, holds another 50 metres' worth. — AFP

New York child dies from rare disease

NEW YORK: A five-year-old boy in New York state has died from a rare inflammatory disease believed to be caused by the new coronavirus, Governor Andrew Cuomo said Friday. "There have been 73 reported cases in NY (state) of children getting severely ill with symptoms similar to Kawasaki disease and toxic shock-like syndrome."

"On Thursday, a 5-year-old boy passed away from these complications, believed to be caused by COVID-19," Cuomo wrote on Twitter. He added that the state's department of health was investigating and called on parents to seek care immediately if their child had a fever lasting more than five days.

Other symptoms include diarrhea or vomiting, breathing trouble, a paling of skin color, chest pain and lethargy, Cuomo said.

Kawasaki disease is a mysterious illness that primarily affects children up to the age of five and causes the walls of arteries to become inflamed, resulting in fever, skin peeling and joint pain.

A rash and swollen glands can also be a sign and if untreated patients can suffer health failure, but those who are given medical care respond well.

Britain's National Health Service first sounded the alarm last month, warning about a small rise in children infected with the coronavirus that have "overlapping features of toxic shock syndrome and atypical Kawasaki disease."

France, Italy and Spain has also reported several cases. Treatment for Kawasaki disease involves intravenous immunoglobulin and aspirin and though frightening, most recover without serious issues.

While no link has been formally established to the new coronavirus, scientists believe it could be connected. In an article published this week in the medical journal The Lancet, British doctors describing eight cases observed in London said it could be "a new phenomenon" affecting previously-asymptomatic children with the coronavirus "manifesting as a hyperinflammatory syndrome".

While youngsters can become infected with the new coronavirus, very few have died or contracted serious symptoms, something that had given solace to parents amid the deadly pandemic.

Cuomo said any confirmed link between COVID-19 and Kawasaki disease would be a worrying development. "This would be really painful news and would open an entirely different chapter," Cuomo told reporters at his daily briefing Friday.

Earlier this week, Mayor Bill de Blasio said a rising number of cases in New York City was causing concern. Of the first 15 confirmed cases in the Big Apple, four patients tested positive for COVID-19 and six who tested negative were found to have antibodies, suggesting they had previously been infected. — AFP

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Lifestyle | Features

Rapper **Tekashi69** smashes Instagram live record with post-prison boast

In this file photo US rap singer Gix9ine, or Tekashi 69, performs during the Philipp Plein fashion show as part of the Women's Spring/Summer 2019 fashion week in Milan.—AFP

Fresh out of prison and in home confinement, rapper Tekashi69 destroyed the Instagram live viewership record, as two million users watched him sound off, diss the haters and promote a new song. It was a birthday party rant of sorts for the braggadocious star who turned 24 Friday, weeks after his early release from prison due to the rapidly spreading coronavirus. Tekashi was sentenced in December to two years in prison on racketeering, firearms and drug trafficking charges. He is serving the remainder of his sentence, up in August, under government surveillance at home. That didn't stop the artist known for his face tattoos and technicolor braids from jumping on Instagram to push his first post-prison track "Gooba," while flaunting his jaw-dropping testimony against former gang associates.

"Y'all could never cooperate with the government and come back — I'm a living legend," the blinged-out rapper said as viewership of the live hit the two million mark. He shattered previous Instagram records held by

Drake and Tory Lanez, who amassed over 310,000 viewers in March, and an R&B battle between Babyface and Teddy Riley that pulled in some half a million last month. "A rat like me to come home and do more numbers than you? I would be mad too," said Tekashi, whose lawyer had dubbed him a "target" for reprisal attacks from associates furious that he "snitched" in court.

The young American rapper born Daniel Hernandez received a lenient sentence after agreeing to a plea deal that required him to take the stand against members of the Nine Trey Gangsta Bloods. The artist pinned his fame — he went viral after release of his debut single "Gunmo" in late 2017 — to street cred over his gang involvement. He rapped with Nine Trey Gangsta Bloods wearing trademark red bandanas in the video for "Gunmo" — but turned on his former associates as a star witness in the sweeping trial. During three days of testimony Tekashi casually detailed everything from gang attacks to the organiza-

tion's leadership web and the gang affiliations of other rappers including Jim Jones and Cardi B. His cooperation spared him a possible life sentence.

The notion of witness protection was floated considering the furor his testimony stoked among gangs — but Tekashi appears set on picking up where he left off. This week, a giant billboard with his image went up in Times Square — deserted as most of New York is ordered to stay home amid the pandemic — to promote "Gooba" and its accompanying video that sees him show off his ankle bracelet. In his rant Tekashi defended his decision to cooperate with federal authorities and thanked the judge for letting him come home. He closed the record-breaking live by saying that "I appreciate every little thing and i didn't do nothin' wrong." "I didn't need all that beef," before returning to his confident airs with an expletive flex: "I'm the biggest artist in the... world."—AFP

Ariana Grande, Justin Bieber drop track for COVID charity

Pop royalty Ariana Grande and Justin Bieber have teamed up for a duet to raise funds for the children of frontline workers fighting coronavirus. The pair, both 26, dropped "Stuck With U" early Friday morning, a bubblegum-sweet ode to isolation with close ones. The now customary shot-from-home style music video features Grande snuggling in bed with her dog — and twirling with a mystery man near the end of the song, who gossip outlets reported is her new real-estate agent boyfriend — as Bieber canoodles with his wife Hailey Baldwin Bieber. The sugar-coated video also mashes up snippets submitted from fans and celebrities, including Kylie and Kendall Jenner, NBA star Stephen Curry and wife Ayesha, Chance the Rapper and Gwyneth Paltrow slow-dancing with her husband in a plaid bathrobe.

Some clips feature people, often with pets, holding signs thanking health workers, as others include teenagers dancing in prom dresses — most students saw the annual dance typical of the American high school experience cancelled over COVID-19. "2 babies all grown up finally collaborate!" posted Bieber on Instagram. Grande lent her vocals to the 2015 remix of Bieber's "What Do You Mean?", but "Stuck With U" is their first single together. "I can't fully articulate howwwww happy i am that we waited this long to do this (the duet thing)," wrote Grande. "being able to lend our voices to this project and collaborating on this has been so fulfilling and i really just love this song so much. grateful to be doing this with my friend."



This combination of file pictures shows singer Justin Bieber (left) in Los Angeles; and singer Ariana Grande, in New York City.—AFP

Guns N' Roses frontman blasts US Treasury secretary

US Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin is tussling with economic meltdown, China tensions, an irascible boss and now... an attack by the swearing, raging frontman of Guns N' Roses. Axl Rose, lead singer of the heavy rock band famous for albums like "Appetite for Destruction," laid into Mnuchin on Twitter. "It's official!" Rose wrote late Wednesday. "Whatever anyone may have previously thought of Steve Mnuchin he's officially an asshole." Mnuchin, who has an aura as square and wonkish as his black-rimmed glasses, surprisingly found time to tweet back. "What have you done for the country lately?" he asked the rockstar, seeking to reinforce his patriotic stance by adding a flag emoji. Unfortunately, the Yale and Goldman Sachs alum put not the US flag but that of Liberia.

That version looks somewhat similar to the American banner but with fewer stripes and, most obviously different, just one star instead of 50. Rose jumped back at Mnuchin. "Didn't get we're hoping 2 emulate Liberia's economic model," he wrote before going on to lash Mnuchin's encouragement of Americans to take domestic vacations despite the coronavirus crisis. While there's no love between Guns N' Roses and the White House, one of their songs, "Live and let die" blasted from speakers earlier this week as President Donald Trump toured a mask-making factory in Arizona.—AFP



Axl Rose



Rapper Ty

Tributes after UK rapper **Ty** dies from coronavirus

British rapper Ty, who was nominated for the prestigious Mercury music prize, has died after contracting coronavirus, according to a fundraising page set up to support him. Stars including Roots Manuva paid tribute to the 47-year-old Londoner, real name Ben Chijioke, who died on Thursday. Ty released his debut album "Awkward" in 2001, the first of five. His follow-up, "Upward", was nominated for the Mercury in 2004 alongside Amy Winehouse. Roots Manuva, who collaborated with the rapper, tweeted on Thursday: "Rest my Brother. You did good." DJ Gilles Peterson said Ty "was a huge part in the development of hip hop and spoken word in this country". "An original no nonsense voice, always sharp, always witty. Today's generation of rappers owe him a lot — a true gate opener. RIP" he tweeted.

The death of Ty, who was born into a Nigerian family, was announced on a fundraising page set up to help him when he fell ill. His manager did not reply to a request for comment from AFP. Fundraising page organizer Diane Laidlaw said Ty was admitted to hospital with complications related to COVID-19, and was put in a medically-induced coma. He woke up and appeared to be getting better but last week contracted pneumonia in hospital, and died on May 7. "The family would like to say a big thank you to everyone who has reached out and expressed their concern since he was admitted in hospital," Laidlaw wrote. "But right now they would value having their privacy, so they can mourn privately."—AFP

McKinley chases 'elusive' Italy win as story becomes film

Italy's Ian McKinley defended the Azzurri's dire Six Nations record as the Irish-born fly-half's inspiring return to elite rugby after being blinded in one eye has been turned into a documentary film. "Lo Sguardo Oltre - Look Beyond," follows his life from Dublin to Treviso and is now available to view on Amazon Prime in Britain and Ireland, and in Italy from May 18. McKinley missed out when the film was screened at the Cannes and the Venice film festivals last year as the 30-year-old was busy training. And the Dubliner, who has played for his adopted country since November 2017, defends the Azzurri despite a 15th Six Nations wooden spoon beckoning when the coronavirus pandemic stopped the tournament in March.

"There's a lot of criticism thrown at the Italian national team with the Six Nations results and not winning for a long time," McKinley told AFP from his home in Treviso. "The players know that, we all know that, but people are working very hard to try and rectify that, to change that winning mentality, but it's a long process. "We're all competitors, we all want to win, not winning games hurts a lot," continued McKinley whose last game for Italy was a 29-10 Rugby World Cup warm-up defeat against Ireland at the Aviva Stadium last August. "You see players working their butts off day in, day out trying to close the gap and trying to get that elusive win." McKinley doesn't like losing.

And "Look Beyond" tells the story of his fight, with the help of his brother Philip, and specially-designed goggles, to find a way back on the field. He lost the sight in his left eye when a player's stud punctured his eyeball in January 2010. The former Leinster and Ireland Under-20 stand-off was forced to retire a year later, ending his dream of playing for Ireland. "(It's) a story of two brothers who join forces to overcome the problems deriving from Ian's disability," Italian director Lia Beltrami said of the 67-minute documentary. "Their story is meant to inspire all those young people who lose heart due to disabilities, loneliness and inner pain and never give up."

'Very personal'

His career seemingly over, McKinley moved to Italy eight years ago to start coaching in Udine, in the

Taylor Swift to broadcast special Paris concert

The coronavirus forced Taylor Swift to cancel her 2020 tour dates, but fans will still get a chance to see the pop star in concert in a special set to air this month. The megastar whose "Lover" album came out last fall announced Friday that a one-hour concert special filmed last September at Paris' Olympia Theatre will air May 17 on ABC, following the season finale of the hit show American Idol. The event will be available the next day for streaming on Hulu and Disney+. "Excited to announce the City of Lover Concert! We filmed my show in Paris in September and thought it'd be fun to share," tweeted the 30-year-old pop phenom famous for hits like "Shake It Off."

Last month Swift — who was set to headline the Glastonbury festival before it fell victim to the pandemic — said her US and Brazil dates would be rescheduled for 2021. "I'm so sad I won't be able to see you guys in concert this year, but I know this is the right decision," Swift tweeted. "Please, please stay healthy and safe. I'll see you on stage as soon as I can but right now what's important is committing to this quarantine, for the sake of all of us." Last month Swift participated in a virtual marathon concert celebrating health workers, one of the Lady Gaga-curated event's top-billed stars that also included The Rolling Stones, Stevie Wonder and Billie Eilish.—AFP



In this file photo US singer Taylor Swift performs onstage during the Z100's iHeartRadio Jingle Ball 2019 at Madison Square Garden in New York.—AFP

north-east near the border with Slovenia. But he desperately missed playing and finally his dream was realised when his brother asked a student from Ireland's National College Art and Design to help design special protective goggles. McKinley was soon playing in the Italian third-tier before a move to semi-professional Viadana, then to Zebre for Pro12 action as injury cover and finally to Treviso in 2016. Then coach Conor O'Shea gave him his debut in November 2017 against Fiji, and he kicked a penalty in a 19-10 win. He now has eight caps for Italy.



In this file photo Irish-born Treviso's fly-half Ian McKinley grabs the ball during the Champions Cup rugby union match RC Toulon vs Treviso at the Mayol stadium in Toulon, southeastern France.—AFP

But the fight didn't end with his return to playing with Ireland as France and England refused to allow players with goggles on the pitch. "The McKinleys don't give up and thanks to an extensive class-action victory the battle to allow 1,500 players worldwide to play with the protective goggles no one is left behind," Beltrami added. The film's premier in Dublin didn't come about because of the coronavirus pandemic, but it has gone onto the online streaming platform and various channels. "It's a very strange feeling opening up your whole world to the general public," said McKinley. "It's not done as a film, it's very much a camera that's opened up into my home, and interviews people that I know, it's very personal."

"Sometimes you look at yourself on the big screen and you put your hands in your head a little bit, but if people get value out of the story that's obviously the main aim of it. "It will hopefully inspire people and show how it is to have a good group of people around you and that's really been the biggest thing I've relished about this." —AFP



In this file photograph US singer Madonna performs during a concert at The AccorHotels Arena in Paris.—AFP

Madonna says she has had COVID-19

Madonna said Thursday she has recovered from the coronavirus which forced her to pull out of a string of concerts in Paris in February and March. The "Queen of Pop" said she had tested positive for antibodies which may mean she had COVID-19 — though at the time she said she didn't realize she had it. "I am not currently sick," she told her 15 million followers on Instagram. "When you test positive for antibodies it means you had the virus, which I clearly did as I was sick at the end of my tour in Paris over seven weeks ago along with many other artists in my show," she said. The 61-year-old star only played a single night in Paris on February 22 before calling off the next show, citing "ongoing injuries".

She later called off two further Paris concerts — the last in her Madame X world tour — after French authorities banned large gatherings in a bid to stem the spread of the virus in early March. "At the time we all thought we had a bad flu," Madonna wrote in her post. "Thank God we are all healthy and well now."

'Cursed'

The Paris dates on Madonna's tour seem to have been cursed, with her opening night concert not starting till after midnight, three and a half hours late. Scientists are sceptical about the accuracy of many antibody tests which claim to show a person has had the virus. Some warned that even those tests that meet the US government's informal standards may produce false positives. The singer revealed she had the virus after sharing an article about her donating \$1.1 million (one million euros) towards research to find a vaccine for the coronavirus. —AFP

LOCKDOWN MOVIE STRIKES EERIE NOTE AT GERMAN VIRTUAL FILM FESTIVAL

Emptied streets below Frankfurt's towering skyscrapers, people desperate for human contact after endless video calls and lockdown enforcement mark one of the winners at this year's Lichter film festival in Germany's financial capital. Last week's regional feature film winner "Live" isn't an up-to-the-minute documentary, but a near-future thought experiment that brewed for years in the head of director and screenwriter Lisa Charlotte Friederich. Since the virus began taking over headlines and sweeping aside public life, "we've had to get used to the idea that we've made a film that's very similar to what we're all experiencing now," Friederich tells AFP.

The movie was in fact inspired years earlier by the wave of deadly terror attacks that swept Europe in 2015-16, from Paris to Brussels and Bavaria. Friederich and her crew imagine a world where an oppressive government has locked down all gatherings of people to minimize risk from an ideologically nebulous threat. "For those of us who live in relative security, there's a relationship" between dangers like terror and the virus, she explains. Both "show us how fragile, how interconnected our world is... we have to think about how we lived before and how we will live in future."—AFP



Picture taken on April 27, 2020 in Frankfurt am Main shows German director and screenwriter Lisa Charlotte Friederich posing next to a playground.—AFP



In this file photo illusionists Siegfried Fischbacher (left) and Roy Horn appear with one of five 6-week-old tiger cubs in Las Vegas, Nevada. —AFP photos



In this file photo French Performer Line Renaud (second left) poses with entertainers Siegfried (second right) & Roy (blue Jacket) and her best friend Annie Nounna (left) during a ceremony honoring her with a street on her name, in Las Vegas, Nevada.



A sign at an entrance at MGM Grand Hotel & Casino on the Las Vegas Strip displays a tribute to Roy Horn after news of his death at age 75.



Candles are lit for Roy Horn on a Las Vegas Walk of Stars plaque for Horn and his magician partner Siegfried Fischbacher in front of bronze busts of the duo outside The Mirage Hotel & Casino on the Las Vegas Strip.

Roy Horn, of magical duo Siegfried and Roy, dies

Roy Horn, half of Las Vegas illusionist duo Siegfried and Roy, died Friday of complications from the coronavirus. He was 75. Known for his work with big cats, elephants and snakes, the German-born magician died at Mountain View Hospital in Las Vegas, his publicist told US media. He tested positive for COVID-19 last week. Horn's celebrated work with exotic animals came to an abrupt and violent end in 2003 when he was dragged from the stage by a 400-pound white tiger and seriously injured. Although he recovered, the Las Vegas show — a hugely lucrative collaboration with long-time partner Siegfried Fischbacher — did not return.

"Today, the world has lost one of the greats of magic, but I have lost my best friend," Fischbacher said in a statement to US media. "There could be no Siegfried without Roy, and no Roy without Siegfried." Born in 1944 in Nordenham, Germany, Horn gravitated towards exotic animals with his first pets — a wolf-dog named Hexe and Chico the cheetah — adopted from Bremen Zoo. He met Fischbacher in 1957 on board a cruise ship where both were employed as entertainers, and after forming a partnership in 1959 the pair went on to work around Europe. They made their Las Vegas debut in the late sixties, eventually settling at The Mirage where they performed hundreds of

shows from 1990 until the 2003 attack.

Horn, who suffered a stroke and partial paralysis when the animal dragged him off stage, always insisted the mauling was not the fault of the white Siberian tiger Mantecore. But Siegfried and Roy made only one more appearance in 2009, and officially retired from show business in 2010. Horn devoted much of the remainder of his life to wildlife conservation. He is survived by his brother, Werner Horn. —AFP

Artist brightens up pandemic-weary Montreal with balcony banners



A handout picture received in London from @BANKSY Instagram feed shows a drawing created by the street artist Banksy called "Game Changer". —AFP

Banksy tribute to UK health service displayed in hospital

A new artwork by Banksy in honor of Britain's health service has gone on display in a hospital, paying tribute to medics battling the coronavirus pandemic in the second hardest-hit country. The street artist also posted an image of the work on Instagram, which shows a boy in dungarees playing with a figurine of a nurse in a superhero cape. The sole splash of color in the artwork — entitled "Game Changer" — is the red cross on the nurse's uniform, while discarded Superman and Batman figures lie in a basket next to the boy.

"Thanks for all you're doing. I hope this brightens the place up a bit, even if it's only black and white," the enigmatic artist said in a note for hospital workers. Hung on a corridor wall at a hospital in Southampton in southern England, the one-square-meter (10-square-foot) tableau will be put on public display when lockdown measures are lifted, a spokeswoman for Banksy said. It will later be auctioned to raise money for charities connected to the country's National Health Service (NHS). Other pieces by the secretive artist have previously fetched millions of dollars. Britain's official COVID-19 death toll this week overtook Italy's, with more than 32,000 fatalities — second only in severity to the United States. —AFP

Artist Patsy Van Roost is brightening up Montreal balconies and putting smiles on pandemic-weary passersby with a variety of personalized messages on multicolored banners hung across the city. "The idea is to spread a little love for people during their solo walks," she told AFP. The notes "are like whispers in people's ears as they walk past or little kisses strewn across the city," she said, sitting at her sewing table stitching together new banners. "People give me messages that I turn into banners, and they put them on their balconies so that their balconies can 'sing' to pedestrians during their brief escapes from self-isolation," Van Roost said.

Since she started her project on March 26, Van Roost has created more than 150 banners cut from waterproof foam sheets. "I only do that, day and night," she said, cutting "one letter at a time by hand" before sewing them together. Her project doesn't stop there: Once people receive and hang their banners, they send her a photo that she marks on Google Maps "so that people can take a virtual stroll from one banner to another." She has just received a new order from a woman in Montreal, whose 92-year-old mother in France is dying. "Obviously, she can't go there. So



Gabriel Corbel and a pregnant Helene Gruenais (right) pose with their banner "here life is multiplying".



Valerie Menguy holds her banner "I live on love and laughter" by artist Patsy Van Roost.

she wanted a banner that said, 'Bon voyage mommy sweetheart,' which she is going to hang on her balcony here in Montreal to help say goodbye," Van Roost said. The banners are unfurling on multiple streets across Montreal.

Valerie Menguy is very happy to hang hers, which proclaims: "I live on love and laughter." For a couple expecting a baby, Van Roost created another one:



Guy Bourbonnais (left), Valerie Harbec (right) and their sons Louis and Charles Bourbonnais, pose with their banner "Happy to be confined with you" by artist Patsy Van Roost in Montreal. —AFP photos



Veronik Carignan and her children Antoine, Camille and Nicolas Louis-Carignan pose with their banner "Thank you for going to the front lines for us" by artist Patsy Van Roost.

One of world's oldest men marks 116th birthday in South Africa

South African Freddie Blom celebrated his 116th birthday on Friday unfazed by the coronavirus crisis, over 100 years since the Spanish flu pandemic killed his sister. "I have lived this long because of God's grace," said Blom, possibly one of the oldest men in the world. Lighting a cigarette, he recalled the 1918 pandemic that left tens of millions dead worldwide including his sister. Blom was born in 1904 in the rural town of Adelaide, tucked near the Great Winterberg mountain range of South Africa's Eastern Cape province. He is older than a 112-year old British resident named the world's oldest living man by the Guinness World Records in March. Blom's age has not yet been verified by the body.

Grandchildren whizzed around as Blom sat on the front yard of his home. Neighbours arrived soon after to sing happy birthday. Blom has spent most of his life working on farms around Cape Town. He met his 86-year old wife Jeanette at a dance and won her heart over with his jive moves. The couple have been married for almost fifty years. They moved to the Cape Town suburb of Delft three decades ago. At his great age, however, he says he won't let the coronavirus pandemic panic him. And he did not mince his words about South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa, complaining about a nationwide ban on cigarette sales as part of a series of lockdown measures. "He doesn't know what

he's doing," Blom grumbled, adding that cigarettes were his only birthday wish this year. Blom stopped visiting doctors more than two years ago, claiming he was tired of being pricked and prodded.

"Now he just takes two Disprins a day, but sometimes he steals my pills," Jeanette said, laughing affectionately at her stubborn husband. While Blom never had children, he adopted Jeanette's two from a previous marriage as his own. "He has done everything for us," said Blom's step-daughter Jasmien Toerien, 38. "He would wake up at three or four in the morning to cycle to work," she fondly recalled. "He loves animals and gardening." —AFP



Freddie Blom poses for a portrait while celebrating his 116th birthday at his home in Delft, near Cape Town in Cape Town. —AFP

Pandemic paradise for French family stuck in India

The Pallares thought they were stuck in a pandemic nightmare when the coronavirus lockdown stranded them in rural India, but now the French family are in seventh heaven — despite the veggie diet. Living in the grounds of a Hindu temple for the past 50 days, it has become "the most beautiful memory" of their road trip for the two parents and their three children, mother Virginie Pallares said. "We are experiencing the most incredible generosity," Pallares, who works in a pharmaceutical laboratory back in France, told AFP from their temporary home in the northern village of Pulwa Dhala.

The villagers "bring us fresh buffalo milk and vegetables. They refuse to take a single rupee and when my son had a 40-degree fever, they took it in turns to help despite the fear of coronavirus." "They even planted three trees as a souvenir of us," the 44-year-old said. The family left their home in Toulouse in southwest France in their 4x4 last July and drove all the way through Turkey, Iran and Pakistan on their way to India. They wanted to continue into Nepal but on March 24 they were turned back at the border after it was shut because of the coronavirus lockdown. But a 66-year-old Hindu priest with greying dreadlocks who

locals call Haridas Baba took them under his wing and invited them to stay with him.

They all cook and eat together. Husband Patrice Pallares, a mechanic, helps with odd jobs. Every evening they join Baba in performing his religious ceremonies. Since he has problems pronouncing their foreign names, he has given all the family new Hindu ones. Virginie for example is now "Yashoda", foster mother of the Hindu deity Krishna. And because he is a strict Hindu, their diet is vegetarian. "The hardest thing is not eating meat anymore. Sometimes we dream about having a nice steak," Pallares said. —AFP



This handout picture taken on April 28, 2020 and received as a courtesy of Pallares family shows Patrice (right) and Virginie Pallares along with their children posing for a picture in front of the trees planted by villagers as a memento of their visit in the northern village of Pulwa Dhala. —AFP

Neighbors help out as fighting coronavirus trumps old rivalries

NICOSIA: Face masks are delivered across dividing lines in Ireland and Cyprus, the United Arab Emirates sends medical supplies to rival Iran, and China and Japan exchange rare warm words. The coronavirus pandemic may have exacerbated global tensions, especially between the United States and China. But in some cases it has also sparked cooperation between longtime rivals.

In one ray of light amid the gloom, Northern Ireland's unionist Orange Order last month secured a shipment of personal protective equipment for distribution both north and south of the border with the Republic of Ireland. That was highly unusual as unionists, who want Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom, are usually wary of cross-border cooperation, seeing it as a gateway to Irish unification.

But the Belfast executive, which includes unionists, also signed a non-binding deal with Dublin to beef up cooperation. "We face a common challenge," said Northern Ireland's health minister Robin Swann, from the headline Democratic Unionist Party. "Facing that challenge will test us as never before." His comment echoed the words of Israeli historian Yuval Noah Harari, who argued in March that "both the epidemic itself and the resulting economic crisis are global problems (requiring) global cooperation".

Writing in the Financial Times, Harari warned that "a collective paralysis has gripped the international community" as the world faces a choice between "nationalist isolation and global solidarity".

Calls by United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in March for a "global ceasefire" also appear to have fallen on deaf ears, with fighting continuing in battlefields from Libya to Yemen. Yet in some cases, the need to fight the virus has trumped old rivalries. On the divided island of Cyprus, the government last month sent 4,000 items of protective equipment and 2,000 chloroquine tablets across the UN-guarded

ceasefire line to help the breakaway north.

It was a rare act of goodwill between the EU member and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, recognized only by Ankara. Cyprus has been divided since 1974, when Turkey invaded the northern third of the island in response to a Greek-backed coup. But the delivery, nearly three years after peace talks collapsed, came under fire from nationalist politicians.

Prime minister Ersin Tatar accused TRNC president Mustafa Akinci of breaking customs regulations and argued that "if we need something, we request it from Turkey". The health minister in the north, Ali Pili, begged to differ, telling news channel BRT TV that "no matter where (the aid) comes from, we accept it".

Earlier in the year, as the COVID-19 illness ravaged China, Japanese businesses and the government donated thousands of protective garments. Chinese social media users hailed the gifts, and Beijing's foreign ministry said it was "extremely touched" - a far cry from the bitterness often overshadowing their relations since before World War II. As in other cases, this generosity may have been partly motivated by pragmatism. As regional expert Victor Teo told AFP, "it is definitely in Japan's national interest that the health threat remains contained." Broader geopolitical trends may also have played a role. Richard McGregor, a senior fellow at the Lowy Institute, pointed out that China was "always more solicitous to Japan" when tensions rise with Washington. The pandemic has also inspired unusual gestures in the Middle East.

The United Arab Emirates evoked the virus as part of its outreach to the president of war-torn Syria, Bashar al-Assad, for years shunned by Arab governments. Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan called Assad late last month for the first time since Syria's civil war began in 2011, pledging his country's "willingness to help the Syrian people". No aid deliveries to Syria have yet been reported. But the



DUBAI: In this file photo taken on March 2, 2020, an Emirati man checks medical equipment and coronavirus testing kits provided by the World Health Organization at Maktoum International airport as tons of aid were about to be delivered to Iran by a UAE military transport plane. — AFP

UAE did dispatch a military plane in March carrying UN medical experts and aid to Assad's ally Iran - despite the fact the Emirates are allied with Washington against Tehran.

The help for Iran, hit by the Middle East's deadliest outbreak, was all the more remarkable as it followed heightened tensions in the Gulf. Recent months saw attacks on shipping, the downing of a US drone and the American killing of a top Iranian commander that had sparked fears of regional war. But senior Emirati

aid official Sultan Mohammed Al-Shamsi said that "aid should reach all people regardless of their background." Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif thanked the UAE, calling the pandemic a "global issue that requires the combined will of all countries to be defeated". Michael Stephens, of the RUSI think tank in London, noted that "aid diplomacy is a big thing in the Islamic world". But he also pointed at self-interest. Despite their disagreements, the UAE and neighboring Iran have close trading links, and tens of thousands of Iranians live in Dubai. — AFP

Turkish doctors turn detectives

Continued from Page 1

more than 133,700 cases, according to data released Thursday. Health Minister Fahrettin Koca said on Monday he believed tracing was "at the heart of (Turkey's) success" in the fight against the disease. Each tracing process identifies an average of 4.5 people who have been in contact with a patient, according to Koca. More than 460,000 people had been contacted by tracers in Turkey, he said on April 29.

To find potential cases, the doctors do "real detective work", said Melek Nur Aslan, director of the public health agency in Fatih district. When a COVID-19 patient is identified, "we try to retrace their journey in the last 48 hours before the appearance of the first symptoms until the moment when they are tested positive" for the virus, she told AFP. For this, the doctors go to the patients' bedside or home with a list of questions: where did they go? Who did they speak to? Were they wearing a mask?

They then compile a list of potentially contaminated people whom they ask to self-isolate for 14 days. If the person has symptoms or develops them during their confinement, they are tested. This is exactly what happened in Fatih where the doctors have just intervened: the woman they visited com-

plained of fatigue and migraines. Once the doctors leave the building, they remove their protective equipment and throw it into a large rubbish bag.

One of them carries a box containing the sample that will be sent to the laboratory during the day. If the test is positive, the woman "will appear as a confirmed case in our file, which will lead to a new tracing process", said one of the tracers, Mustafa Sever, a GP.

The tracers' role will also be crucial to avoid a second wave of contagion as Turkey prepares to loosen restrictive measures, including reopening shopping centers and hairdressers from tomorrow. Unlike in some other countries where tracing has led to debates over confidentiality and how the data is used, Turkey began this route to tackling the pandemic from the start.

Aslan said only the health workers in charge of tracking potential coronavirus cases have access to the data collected. Tracing is not new in Turkey - Sever said he had carried out similar "investigations" during measles epidemics in Istanbul. The tracers also rely on family doctors who regularly call their patients to enquire about their health and ensure they are respecting lockdown measures.

In Istanbul alone, 1,200 teams of two to four tracers constantly track potential new cases, Aslan said. In addition to their tracing efforts, they also provide advice on how to avoid infecting others and reassure people they visit. "When we go to people's homes, they see that someone is taking care of them, that they are not neglected," said Sever. "If they are worried, we speak a little with them to reassure them." — AFP

long time, adding that the coronavirus is a health crisis and "we will not allow it to become a food crisis". He urged the public not to stockpile foodstuff because it is available in good quantities.

The ministry has launched online reservation to purchase essentials from cooperative societies and supermarkets and one person from each family will be allowed to go once every six days. Minister of State for Municipality Affairs Waleed Al-Jassem said that private supermarkets and grocery stores will remain open in various areas.

The ministry of health reported Saturday 415 new coronavirus infections in the last 24 hours, bringing the tally to 7,623. Deaths reached 49 with two new cases. The ministry's official spokesperson Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said in a statement to KUNA that among the infected cases discovered in past 24 hours, there are 92 Egyptians, 89 Indians, 86 Kuwaitis and 51 Bangladeshis.

Densely populated governorates Farwaniya and Hawally topped with the number of cases. The former had 172 cases and the latter 108, in addition to Capital governorate with 60 cases, Ahmadi with 48 and Jahra with 27. Sanad revealed 95 patients remain in intensive care units, adding that the overall number of infected persons who continue to receive medical care has reached 4,952.

Up to 556 patients were discharged from quarantine in the past 24 hours but would subject themselves to home isolation for 14 days, Sanad said. Earlier, the health ministry announced the recovery of 156 people from COVID-19, bringing the tally to 2,622 recoveries.

The health ministry reported on Friday 641 new coronavirus cases, the largest tally on a single day in addition to three deaths, including a 62-year-old Egyptian doctor, Tareq Hussein Mukhaimer, the first physician to die in the country because of the deadly virus. Of the new cases reported Friday, 160 were for Indians, 157 for Kuwaitis and 122 for Egyptians and the rest for several nationalities. According to statistics, in March there were 300 cases which rose to 4,000 cases in April but surged to 3,200 cases in the first eight days of May. In addition, there was a steep rise in cases among Kuwaiti citizens recording 655 cases in the first eight days of May.

Gulf faces exodus of...

Continued from Page 1

Many qualified professionals have not been spared. "You go online, you apply for thousands of jobs, but they're all expired," said Egyptian-American architect Nada Karim, who was due to start a new job in Dubai when the firm froze hiring. "I can resist here for two or three months without a salary, then I'll have to leave." Samer, a Lebanese-Canadian working at an advertising agency in Saudi Arabia, has been put on six-month unpaid leave and is considering moving to Canada if things do not improve. "It is very confusing and worrying when you suddenly cannot plan for your future," he said.

The Middle East is headed for an economic downturn this year that dwarfs 2008 and 2014/2015 as countries are hit by the double blow from coronavirus closures and record low oil prices, the International Monetary Fund said. "Fewer expats

will crimp demand for everything from pizzas to villas, and the danger is that this leads to a cascading deflationary impact with secondary job losses," said Tarek Fadlallah of Nomura Asset Management Middle East.

Official unemployment data is not available, but several Gulf airlines and ride-sharing firm Careem have said they are laying off hundreds of workers. Dubai, a business and tourism hub, was hoping for an economic boost from hosting the Expo world fair this year but the event was postponed until Oct 2021 due to the pandemic. Last week, Expo 2020 Dubai made redundant 179 employees, according to an internal document seen by Reuters. Expo declined to comment.

"Expatriates are not just a cog in the machine - they play an integral part in the domestic recycling of capital that helps sustain Gulf economies," said Robert Mogielnicki, a resident scholar at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington. The flight of expats could reduce government income from fees and value-added tax and slow reform efforts, including reducing state spending on wages and subsidies, analysts have said. — Reuters

World leaders scrutinized...

Continued from Page 1

wear or forgo a mask in public is based on what message the leader wants to convey," behavioral scientist Jacqueline Gollan of Northwestern University in Chicago, Illinois, told AFP. "They are more likely to wear a mask if the leader believes in promoting public health. They may forgo the mask if the leader believes that they should convey that the risk of transmission is low and things are normalized," she said.

Some have started to appear in public in simple medical masks or more protective N95 or FFP2 masks, others are opting for the washable fabric ones that many governments are encouraging the public to wear. But a handful, including US President Trump and Brazil's leader Jair Bolsonaro, are bucking the trend and going about bare-faced.

Whatever a leader's motivation, "it sets an example that many people will follow, whether that is to comply with or ignore the advice" on mask-wearing, said Claudia Pagliari, an eHealth researcher at the University of Edinburgh. Over 50 countries now require people to cover their faces when they leave home, especially on public transport and in shops.

But in many places, there are still not enough medical-grade masks to go around without eating into stocks needed to shield frontline doctors and nurses. This has caused many - more than three quarters in France according to a recent poll - to suspect their governments lied about the efficacy of mask-wearing at the outset to avoid a run on stocks.

"Certainly public officials are guilty of thinking the public is... dumb and incapable of understanding a complex message," said Matthew Lesh, a public policy expert at the Adam Smith Institute in London. "Therefore they simplify the message in order to get it across," in this case "a very simple message that masks don't really work."

KK Cheng, director of the Institute of Applied Health Research at Birmingham University, said politicians' initial stance was largely based on the lack of

clinical trials to prove that masks do work. The World Health Organization also does not recommend compulsory mask-wearing by all.

Governments "misunderstood, or haven't appreciated... the nature of evidence needed for an intervention like this," said Cheng, an early proponent of the role of masks in combating the epidemic who insists: "It's simple physics." "If it doesn't work, why on Earth do we ask people to cover their mouth when they cough? There's no clinical trials on that either but we've never questioned that," he said.

As a consensus has emerged that masks, even homemade ones, do help - though levels of protection vary - political leaders have had to adjust their messaging. Among those embracing the change is French President Macron, who met primary school children this week in a dark blue fabric mask that matched his suit and featured a label in the red, white and blue colors of the national flag.

He admitted he was still getting used to the item as he explained its role in preventing asymptomatic virus-carriers passing on the virus. "I'm going to clean my hands now because I keep touching my mask," the president told the youngsters as he reached for a large bottle of sanitizing hand gel. Last month, South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa provoked ridicule when he fumbled with his mask, made of an African-print fabric, at a briefing - awkwardly pulling it over his eyes at one point. But some commentators said the fumble made him endearingly human.

In March, Slovakian leader Zuzana Caputova stole the limelight when she swore in a new government sporting a stylish fabric mask that matched her dress and shoes. Trump, in contrast, has consistently flouted the advice of the US Centers for Disease Control to cover up in public. This week, he visited a factory that makes masks but pointedly ignored signs at the facility urging: "Please wear your mask at all times." Instead he sported a pair of clear goggles.

In April, the president said about masks: "Somehow, I don't see it for myself." "Unfortunately the coronavirus pandemic is taking place alongside a global populist movement, which has brought a generation of political 'hard men' into power," Pagliari said. "Sadly, masks have become the latest totem of this populist movement, as they did during the Spanish flu of 1919-20, where they were seen by protestors as symbols of heavy-handed state control." — AFP

many as half the passengers were infected. "Our ministry of foreign affairs has raised this issue with those countries and we are finding ways so it should not happen again," he said. Citing economic pressures, Prime Minister Imran Khan on Thursday announced the easing of a nationwide lockdown, sparking fears coronavirus cases may increase dramatically. More than 26,000 cases of COVID-19 have been confirmed so far, with the death toll at a relatively low 600 or so in the nation of about 215 million people. — AFP

20-day total lockdown from...

Continued from Page 1

authorities and will start at 4 pm on Sunday and end on May 30, which means the remaining two weeks of Ramadan and Eid Al-Fitr holidays are included. Mizrem said the Council of Ministers assigned the interior minister to "implement the total curfew in the country and that employees of vital installations will be allowed to leave home".

He said the Cabinet also decided to suspend the work of the private sector and suspended delivery services except for cooperative societies and pharmacies. The Cabinet said that people are allowed to exercise walking between 4.30 to 6.30 pm daily but are not allowed to drive. People will be required to wear protective masks. The Cabinet also decided to form a main emergency team in each governorate.

Interior Minister Anas Al-Saleh told a press conference the lockdown is the final stage of measures to contain the spread of the coronavirus, saying that life will begin returning to normal after the lockdown ends on May 30. He said that employees at vital installations like electricity, oil and municipality, in addition to employees at private firms assisting them will be allowed to continue operations during the lockdown to ensure the continuity of essential services.

All banks will be closed, but will continue to provide services electronically. In addition, print newspapers will be suspended and home deliveries will be allowed only for essential food and pharmaceutical supplies. Health Minister Sheikh Basel Al-Sabah called on all to cooperate with the lockdown to ensure its success, adding that it was imposed after the return of over 29,000 citizens from abroad. He said the number of infections among citizens began to rise after April 22 with the start of an airlift to bring citizens back home.

Minister of Commerce and Industry Khaled Al-Roudhan called on the public not to panic because food supplies and storage are sufficient for a very

Stars


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hard


Friday's Solution								
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easy


STAR TRACK

Aries (March 21-April 19)
 Expect today to be tense, Aries, as the people close to you could be especially irritable. Adults and children alike may throw tantrums for no reason, and you'll be criticized for having overlooked some small detail. Quarantine is hard on everyone! Fortunately, your new awareness helps you realize that you aren't obligated to do any favors. In this new role, you can express your discontent with a quiet, calm authority.


Libra (September 23-October 22)
 Until now, you didn't know you were capable of managing people with problems. But the so-called poetic universe you inhabit is actually much more realistic than it seems at first glance. People who believe that human reality is 100 percent logical will feel ridiculous when they see the elegant, humane solutions you invent.


Taurus (April 20-May 20)
 The moment has come to affirm your individuality and life choices, Taurus. The planetary energy will make you work hard to rethink the number of obligations you undertake. Admit it! They've been weighing you down. You can exist comfortably without them, and you can accomplish all that you do with much more effectiveness and enthusiasm if you lighten your load. By all means, liberate yourself!


Scorpio (October 23-November 21)
 At last, a day of relief from the tension! The flow of communication facilitates personal and professional projects. Now is the time to listen to your partner or other family members about the material aspects of the future. For example, are you setting aside enough money for your children's education? Are you taking proper care of your home? Are your investments allocated correctly? These are all issues worth considering today.


Gemini (May 21-June 20)
 Why not go directly to the heart of the problem, Gemini? This could be the question you've been asking yourself about a commitment to a cause that's important to you. Even if your life seems too far removed to support that cause, this just might be the time to make the leap. In any case, such leaps of faith tend to occur during days with this kind of planetary energy.


Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)
 You're well aware that your happiness in love doesn't depend on emotional promises alone. In order to attract your attention, anyone new in your life has to make some material offering as well. That's exactly what could happen today. That next package dropped at your door might be a gift from someone who has been buzzing around you for some time. Smile, Sagittarius. People are finally beginning to catch on.


Cancer (June 21-July 22)
 Don't let your fear or anger get the better of you today, Cancer. You'll be pushed to the forefront and may even be forced to make some big decisions regarding the direction of your professional life. Perhaps you've been feeling that it's still premature to take action, but frankly, you no longer have any choice. Whether you know it or not, you're ready!

Capricorn (December 22-January 19)
 Things are coming to a difficult stalemate regarding the love in your life, Capricorn. Perhaps you've felt like everything was going fine and you had nothing to worry about. In reality, this notion of "fine" was just your self-denial hard at work making you think that you could continue on your path without really considering how your actions affected others.

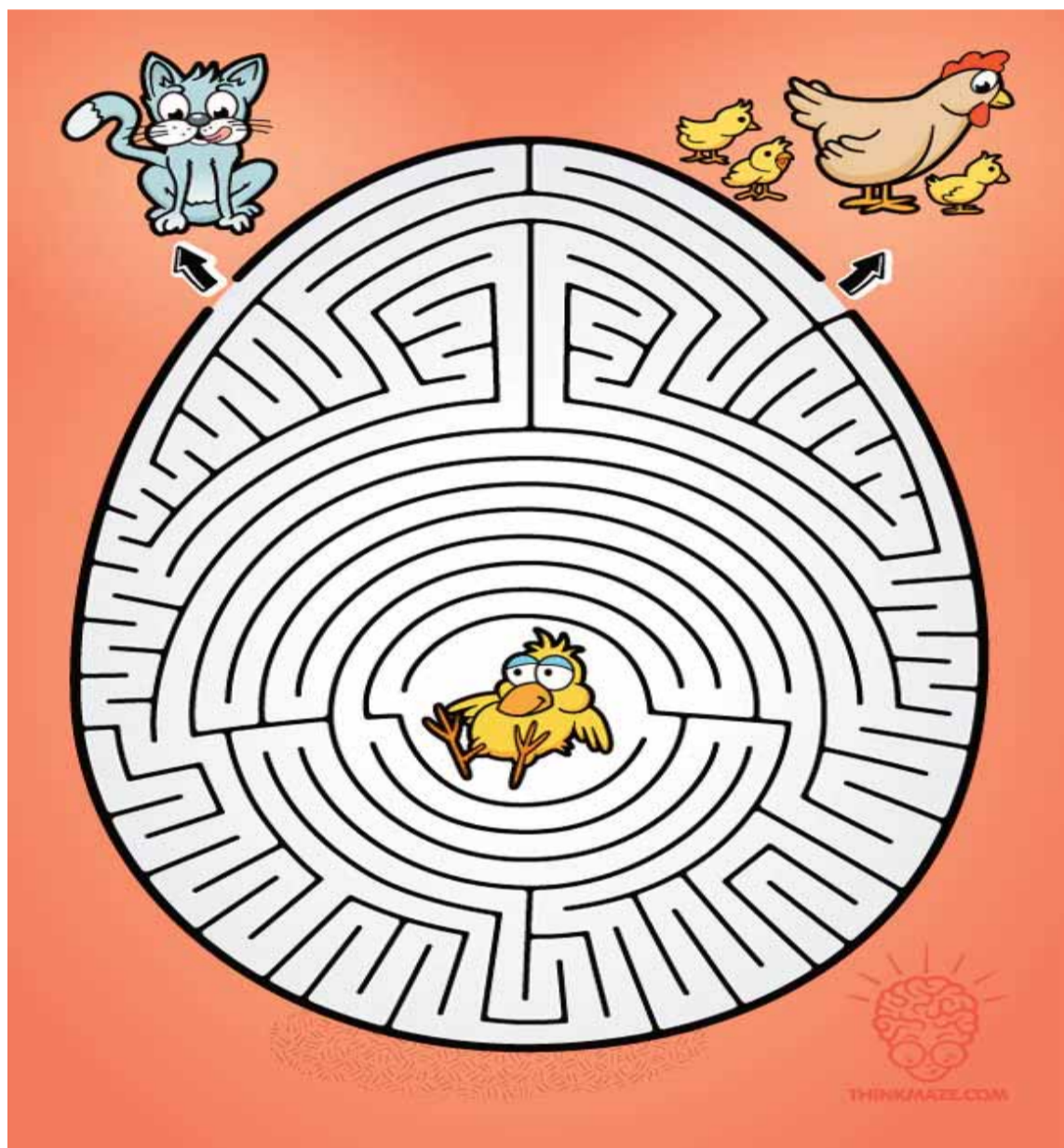
Leo (July 23-August 22)
 Your ideas about life are going through some radical changes. None of the givens that you've always taken for granted seem to apply any more, Leo. Rather than lament these changes, grow from them. Don't drag your feet! Stand up and move ahead! Even though the world has slowed to a crawl, this is no time for a vacation. You have some rebuilding to do.

Aquarius (January 20-February 18)
 Today is a good day to organize professional or personal meetings. They'll be productive. It's an auspicious time for efficient, serious communication, realistic plans, and group harmony. All ingredients for success and true advancement are available. Don't be surprised if you're the one in charge. You excel at creating a warm, welcoming atmosphere, even through the chilly distance of videoconferencing.

Virgo (August 23-September 22)
 Who would have guessed that you have an ability to understand subjects as irrational as human passions? You're getting down and dirty with the sticky, trivial realities of day-to-day life that never interested you before. Social distancing piques your curiosity. Your new nistick coating would make you an excellent personnel director, hiring and firing at the drop of a hat.

Pisces (February 19-March 20)
 It isn't always easy to win the admiration you expect from your partner, Pisces. But in this area, today seems to be better than most. You're likely to be brimming with ideas for ways to enhance your most appealing qualities. But don't overdo it. Your efforts at physical or intellectual seduction are most effective when they're subtle.

Find the way



Join the dots



Crossword

Parts of My Car

Word Search

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

- AIR BAG
- AIR CONDITIONER
- ALTERNATOR
- AXLE
- BATTERY
- BRAKE
- CARBURETOR
- CLUTCH
- DEFROSTER
- DOOR
- DRIVESHAFT
- ENGINE
- FRAME
- FUSE
- GAS TANK
- HEADLIGHT
- HOOD
- HORN
- IGNITION
- MUFFLER
- RADIATOR
- RADIO
- ROOF
- SEAT BELT
- STARTER
- STEERING WHEEL
- SUSPENSION
- TAILLIGHT
- TIRE
- TRANSMISSION
- TRUNK
- TURN SIGNAL
- WINDSHIELD

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Sports

Photo of the day



CARTAGENA: Mariana Pajon riding around at San Felipe Castle in Cartagena, Colombia. —Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

Aussie Super Rugby eyes early return

SYDNEY: Australia's Super Rugby competition is planning for an early July return, a spokesman said yesterday, after the coronavirus outbreak derailed the season and sparked turmoil within the sport's cash-strapped governing body.

Rugby Australia's board suffered another tumultuous week with new director Peter Wiggs — who had been tipped to take over the chairman's role — quitting after just five weeks in the job. His departure followed the resignation last month of chief executive Raelene Castle after pressure from the board and a simmering financial crisis.

Clubs are set to begin training in the coming days under strict health regulations aimed at preventing the spread of COVID-19 among players, a spokesman said yesterday. "We do not have a confirmed date for the resumption of Super Rugby in Australia, however early July presents a best case scenario," he added.

This year's Super Rugby competition saw seven rounds played before the pandemic forced a stop to the season in March. The modified domestic fixture will not include matches against international opponents but will reportedly see the return of the Perth-based Western Force, which left the top flight competition in 2017.

New Zealand has also announced its own domestic competition for its five teams playing over 10 rounds in closed stadiums. The COVID-19 shutdown has intensified financial strains on Rugby Australia, which was already struggling after reaching a multi-million dollar settlement with star try-scorer Israel Folau over his sacking for homophobic comments.

It reported a provisional Aus\$9.4 million (\$6 million) operating deficit last year and has laid off 75 percent of staff to cut costs during the coronavirus emergency. —AFP

Nike rivals play catch-up in marathon shoe wars

Adidas, Asics, Brooks, Hoka unveil carbon-fiber versions

PARIS: When Eliud Kipchoge made history by beating the two-hour mark for the marathon, the Kenyan was wearing a pair of controversial Nike running shoes that has sent rival companies scrambling to play catch-up in a business worth billions of dollars. The likes of Adidas, Asics, Brooks, Hoka, New Balance and Saucony have recently released or are about to unveil their own carbon-fiber versions of running shoes.

Critics claim the new shoes are the equivalent of mechanical doping, while supporters hail them as a revolutionary technical advance in footwear after decades of stagnation. Nike said its Vaporfly range, unveiled in 2016, was an "example of how product design can capture the fascination of an entire sporting community and, more broadly, inspire new benchmarks of athletic potential", boasting an improvement in times by up to four percent.

Elite athletes wearing versions of the Vaporfly, the carbon plates of which lend a propulsive sensation to every stride, have set a rash of personal bests and Nike runners have practically swept the board in long-distance events—they took 31 of the 36 podium places at the six marathon majors last year. Kipchoge was wearing an AlphaFly prototype boasting three carbon-fiber plates when he dipped under two hours in Vienna on October 12, while fellow Kenyan Brigid Kosgei was in ZoomX Vaporfly Next% shoes featuring a single plate when she set a startling new women's record of 2hr 14min 04sec in Chicago a day later.

Critics have been quick to question the advantage Nike-wearing athletes suddenly enjoyed. That led to World Athletics eventually stepping in to limit the thickness of the sole to 40 millimetres (Vaporfly are 36mm) and one embedded plate, while also insisting that running shoes had to be commercially available from mid-March to be allowed in elite competition—that is, no more prototypes.

"Technology made other sports evolve" — "My belief is that shoes with carbon-fiber plates are part of the long-term evolution of running shoes and part of the continued innovation that has been at the centre of running shoe development since the early 1970s," US-based journalist Brian

Metzler, author of 'Kicksology: The Hype, Science, Culture and Cool of Running Shoes', told AFP.

"I believe those shoes are fair for several reasons, but the biggest is that they do not artificially create energy but instead only maximize the force and energy a runner naturally puts into his or her stride," Metzler said. He argued that tennis, skiing, cycling, golf and football had evolved because of advancements in equipment. "The key is that, at some point, all competitors must have access to similar or equal technology to ensure an equal playing field." Geoff Burns, a biomechanics and sport performance researcher at the University of Michigan, said the introduction of Vaporflies had been a tipping point.

"Previously, the optimality equation for racing shoes was to provide a little bit of cushion at the lightest possible weight," Burns told AFP. "The new foam allowed engineers and biomechanists to rethink the architecture of what was on someone's foot, and they demonstrated that substantial gains in performance were still on the table with equipment modifications despite having been largely stagnant for the better part of four decades."

'ABSOLUTELY UNFAIR'

Amby Burfoot, winner of the 1968 Boston marathon and a former editor-in-chief of Runner's World magazine, said he thought the unannounced introduction of the Nike shoes in 2016, particularly at the US Olympic Marathon Trials and the Rio Olympics, had been "absolutely unfair". "It was equivalent to letting one group of pole vaulters use fibreglass while everyone else was consigned to bamboo or some other stiff material," Burfoot told AFP.

Burns, who competes internationally in ultramarathons, said it was now a question of "how much we want performances to be feats of engineering". He argued it was not too far along the development curve that World Athletics could not further tighten regulations if they deemed it necessary. "The sport is in a place where our interpretation of results and performances will always be coloured by equipment qualifications. Do we want that? Some do, as some see engineering advances as a fun part of the equation.

"Others don't, as they see it as distorting the

the greatest heights of her sport and helped her weather the crushing lows.

Rocketing to acclaim at 17, Franklin took home five medals from the 2012 London Olympics, including four golds, and set a world record in the 200 metres backstroke, becoming a household name in the United States despite turning down lucrative endorsements to pursue a college career.

She became a source of hope and inspiration for the Aurora, Colorado community during her 2012 Olympic run, as the town where she grew up reeled from a deadly mass shooting inside a cinema, telling reporters she wanted to make Colorado proud.

"For Missy to take time in the midst of her finest moment to think about her hometown and



VIENNA: This file photograph taken on October 12, 2019, shows the controversial Nike AlphaFly prototype shoes worn by Kenya's Eliud Kipchoge as he stands after his attempt to bust the mythical two-hour barrier for the marathon in Prater Park, Vienna, with an unofficial time of 1hr 59min 40.2sec. —AFP

purity of the human performance. Everybody falls somewhere along that spectrum." Nike seems to have a significant headstart on other producers in research and development, although major rivals have scrambled to launch their own versions in a bid for a share of the ultra-competitive market. "To be fair, Nike has always been a leading innovator in athletic shoes and apparel," explains Metzler.

"That's been a part of their corporate identity since the 1970s as a means to becoming the successful leader it is. He said the controversial shoes were "by far" the leaders in performance and sales "because Nike is a successful marketing machine" and with a large percentage of the world's best runners under contract "their visibility and hype is much greater." Burfoot argues that other manufacturers had been left for dust.

"The world woke up to a new reality. But it wasn't easy for other shoe companies to catch up to Nike—it took time, and trial and error—and we still don't know how much they have closed the gap." Running shoe expert Burns said in terms of the rivals' new shoes "there are only one or two that may be getting close to Nike's". "It seems that most other companies have made shoes that are a step forward from their previous racing shoes, but I'd be

surprised if any of them are quite as beneficial as the original Vaporfly 4% from three years ago, let alone the newer iterations."

Adidas, Asics, Brooks and Saucony, following Nike and Hoka, are releasing marathon shoes this year on sale to all runners, in time for the Tokyo Olympics, postponed to next year because of the coronavirus pandemic. "The difference now is that we have rules somewhat regulating shoe design. It's not total Wild West any longer. Given the World Athletics regulations, it will be tough for one shoe to stand out dramatically from the herd," argued Burfoot. But the COVID-19 outbreak could favour Nike, Metzler argues.

"Several brands have delayed or postponed shoe launches because of the pandemic and shoe sales and marketing have decreased, partially because races, race expos and running stores have been postponed or closed," he said. While there were "great new shoes" from several brands, he said he was "not sure how much exposure they'll get this spring and summer". All shoe companies, Burns said, will also be looking at the best way of riding out what is proving to be an economically disastrous pandemic that has already seen factory shut-downs in Asia. —AFP

Missy claimed six golds at 2013 World Championships

NEW YORK: A "star in the making" were the prophetic words of an announcer who had just witnessed 16-year-old Missy Franklin slice up the competition at swimming's 2011 world championships.

Franklin, who would just as soon use her 6-foot-four-inch wingspan to hug a competitor as she would to demolish them in the pool, harnessed an upbeat outlook that propelled her to

how she can help in its healing is an incredible statement about her character," Aurora Mayor Steve Hogan said at the time.

She claimed six golds at the 2013 World Championships, the most ever by a female swimmer at one edition. Yet a relatively disappointing showing at the 2016 Rio Olympics, where she took home a solitary relay gold, cut the fairytale short as she discovered she had fallen out of love for the sport.

Franklin failed to qualify for the final in the 200m backstroke in Rio, the event in which she had set a world record four years previously, after qualifying for only three events at trials. "I felt like David facing Goliath but I didn't have any stones in my pocket," she told reporters in Rio.

Yet while the loss of form may have surprised

some, Franklin said in her 2016 book "Relentless Spirit" that she knew at the U.S. Olympic Trials, long before she arrived in Rio, that it was not her year.

"I hated that the sport I'd loved so much, had given me so much, was making me feel the way I was feeling during trials," she wrote. "So unsure of myself. So off my game." Franklin wrote that she resolved to stand as a different kind of role model in defeat.

"It's one thing to inspire all these little girls by winning a bunch of medals. That's easy," wrote Franklin. "But it's another thing entirely to be an inspiration when things aren't exactly going your way."

She missed the world championships in 2017 to recover from surgery and retired in 2018, after years of pain caused by shoulder injuries. —Reuters

Sports

None more unbeatable than Djokovic at his best: Martin

Federer is nearing the end of glittering career

PARIS: There is no one more unbeatable in men's tennis than Novak Djokovic when the Serb is at his best, former world number four American Todd Martin has said.

Reigning world number one Djokovic has already established himself as one of the best ever to play the game and the Serb's Grand Slam haul of 17 is just three behind the 20 that Roger Federer has amassed. The Swiss player will be 39 in August.

While Federer is nearing the end of a glittering career, Spanish left-hander Rafa Nadal is just one behind with 19 majors and will be 34 next month. Djokovic is the youngest of the so-called 'Big Three' and will be 33 later in May.

The triumvirate have shared the last 13 Grand Slam titles, re-energising the GOAT (greatest of all time) debate.

"Roger is the most aesthetically pleasing I have ever seen," Martin, who was part of Djokovic's coaching team briefly in 2009 and 2010, told Tennis365.

"He is pleasing with the serve, he is pleasing with the return, offence, defence ... everything he does really looks beautiful.

"For me though, if Novak is right, if Novak is confident and comfortable with his physical status and is really focused, I've never seen anybody more unbeatable. This guy has played the game better than anyone else ever has, in my opinion."

Djokovic was in imperious form before the novel coronavirus pandemic brought the circuit to a halt in early March.

He lifted the ATP Cup with Serbia, won an eighth Australian Open title and then completed a fifth triumph at the Dubai Tennis Championships, extending his unbeaten run to 21.

"His athleticism is from another world," said Martin, who reached two Grand Slam finals. "His return of serve is way better than any other returner of serve ever and I mean way better.

"Having worked with him, when he is focused he has that 'I'm going through a brick wall mentality'. Now he is not always focused, but when he is and we have seen this for long stretches, he doesn't have to play great. He is that much of a fighter and thrives on it."

The virus forced the cancellation of this year's Wimbledon for the first time since World War Two while the French Open was pushed back from its May start to September, shortly after the scheduled end of the US Open.

Federer, who is currently ranked fourth, last played at the semi-finals of the Australian Open, where he lost to Djokovic, before undergoing keyhole surgery on his knee in February.

Martin said Federer was a "natural" and he still expected the Swiss to challenge for Grand Slam titles



Novak Djokovic

Pleasing with the serve



when the season is able to restart.

"With the Olympics being postponed, I would imagine it will compel him to play another year," Martin said. "Plus, this is no way to end anything. It is really important to Roger, I would imagine, to conclude

his career on a bona fide high note. "Nothing I've seen indicates that physically he is incapable of keeping going. Nothing I've seen has indicated his love for the sport has waned, so I wouldn't be surprised if we see several more years out of him." — Reuters

Olympian's online workouts feed Philippines families

MANILA: Filipina weightlifting star Hidilyn Diaz noticed live-streamed concerts were collecting money for coronavirus relief and was struck by inspiration: why not raise funds with an online workout?

Since then the Olympic silver-medallist — and strong contender for her country's first Games gold — has made enough money to buy food packs for hundreds of hard-hit families in the Philippines.

Diaz has done it all from Malaysia, where she was training to qualify for the now-postponed Tokyo Olympics when much of the world locked down against the virus in March.

"I thought (distribution) would be impossible because I'm not physically present," Diaz, 29, told AFP.

"It's a good thing that I have trusted friends and trusted family members who understand why we need to do a fundraising."

That circle of supporters has handed out the packages, which include vegetables, eggs and rice, to more than 400 families. The food was bought with donations from about 50 people who joined sessions that lasted up to three hours, and gave them a rare chance to train with an elite athlete.

'LOSING MY MIND'

Diaz rose to fame in 2016 after snagging a surprise silver in the 53 kilogramme category in Rio, becoming the Philippines' first female Olympic medallist and ending the nation's 20-year medal drought at the Games.

Two years later, she won gold at the Asian Games



MANILA: File photo taken on December 2, 2019 shows Hidilyn Diaz of the Philippines competing in the women's 55kg weightlifting snatch event at the SEA Games (Southeast Asian Games) in Manila. —AFP

in Indonesia. However, her quest to qualify for Tokyo is on hold ahead of the Games' rescheduled opening in July 2021.

"I thought all the hard work would soon be over... then it was extended," she said. "But I'm still thankful I can still continue with (the training) I need to do." Still, the lockdown broke her daily training regimen, keeping her away from weights for 14 days for the first time in her career.

"I felt like I was losing my mind already. I've been carrying the barbell for 18 years and all of a sudden it's gone. Those were the kinds of anxiety that I felt," she said. But she got access to some equipment, and with

her coach's urging, got back to work. She was relieved to find her strength was still there.

Instead of a Tokyo berth, the past months have been about a different kind of accomplishment for Diaz: helping her countrymen get through the coronavirus crisis.

Rosemelyn Francisco's family in Zamboanga City, Diaz's home town, is one of the first to get help from the athlete's initiative, and is deeply grateful. Her family was not wealthy to begin with, and the pandemic has cost her husband his construction job.

"The food she donated has all everything we need, including eggs," said Francisco, 27. —AFP

Inter, AC Milan back training after two month lockdown

MILAN: Italian football giants Inter Milan and AC Milan were both back training on Friday two months after a strict lockdown which has hit the northern Italian city hard.

Inter said all their players and staff had tested negative for the coronavirus on Friday, clearing the way for them to return to individual training. Captain Samir Handanovic led the way in the afternoon as players, including Belgium striker Romelu Lukaku, wearing face masks and some in gloves, arrived at the team's Appiano Gentile training centre, 35km northwest of Milan.

Temperatures were taken on arrival with three groups of players alternating in the afternoon to respect social distancing rules. Their city rival resumed earlier in the week with club technical director Paolo Maldini warning "not going back on the pitch would be a disaster."

Former captain Maldini, together with his 18-year-old son Daniel, a Milan youth team player, have both recovered from COVID-19, but the San Siro outfit revealed on Friday that some squad members are still not negative.

"You have to be careful, but not to resume would be a disaster from all points of view," 51-year-old Maldini said during an Instagram Live chat on Friday. "France were wrong to decree the end immediately, but we will accept what will be the verdict of the government. There is so much uncertainty."

The city in the northern Lombardy region is the epicentre of Italy's outbreak, one of the worst in Europe in terms of deaths and infections. It has suffered some 15,000 deaths, around half of Italy's 30,000 coronavirus fatalities, since the outbreak first erupted in early March.

'NEGATIVE SIGNALS'

One by one stars have returned to Italy with Juventus forward Cristiano Ronaldo in two weeks' coronavirus

quarantine as his team got back to training on Tuesday. Milan are awaiting the return of Swedish star Zlatan Ibrahimovic early next week.

But opinions are divided on whether to follow France and the Netherlands and end the season or the Bundesliga and return behind closed doors. The Italian Football Federation (FIGC) met on Thursday with the government's technical scientific committee to discuss details of the medical protocol for a return to group training.

"Tell us what we need to do to return to play," FIGC president Gabriele Gravina was reported to have told government officials. Italian Sports Minister Vincenzo Spadafora said afterwards he was "hopeful" group training could resume on May 18.

"I don't want to risk forecasts at this time, we must be careful," said Spadafora. "If it is to be resumed, it will be behind closed doors." Almost at the same time as the meeting two clubs, Fiorentina and Sampdoria, announced ten positive tests — seven players and three staff members.

In addition, a Torino player tested positive on Wednesday, giving "extremely negative signals for a restart of the championship," according to newspaper Il Messaggero. Italian football bosses want to follow the example of Germany, which returns to action on May 16 and where only positive cases would be put into isolation. But the scientific committee insisted football must comply with the general rule that those who have been in contact with positive cases should be isolated. In this scenario, any positive screening after the resumption of collective training on May 18, would sideline the entire team.

Another obstacle is the scientific committee protocol requires regular repeated screening for each player, which means clubs would need to acquire a considerable number of testing kits, which could prove difficult in regions such as Lombardy.

There is also the problem of individual regions which could refuse to host teams from highly-infected areas. Serie A, meanwhile, has called an emergency assembly next Wednesday to take stock of the situation, and also to discuss TV rights. — AFP

Cricket's 'magic' up in smoke without live audience

NEW DELHI: India captain Virat Kohli believes cricket will be robbed of its "magical moments" if games are forced into empty stadiums when the sport emerges from its pandemic lockdown. "It might happen. I honestly don't know how everyone's going to be able to take that, because we are used to playing in front of so many passionate people," said the star batsman.

"It will be played at a very good intensity, but that feel of the crowd connecting with the players, everyone feeling that tension around the stadium, those emotions are difficult to recreate," he told the Star Sports television channel on Friday.

The coronavirus pandemic has halted all major sports and cricket is suffering without its cash-rich Indian Premier League (IPL) which should now be reaching its final stages. "We will play the sport how it's supposed to be played but those magical moments would be very difficult to come by," Kohli said.

Some European football leagues are already making plans to restart in empty stadiums. But the IPL has not announced its intentions and there are now major doubts on whether the Twenty20 World Cup will start in Australia in October.

The International Cricket Council has said it is "exploring all options" for the tournament. Australia's wicketkeeper-batsman Alex Carey, who was to play for the Delhi Capitals in the IPL, said it would be a "hollow feeling" if games are played in front of empty stands.

"Cricket as we're used to is going to be different for a bit. There's the T20 World Cup and the IPL that we're all looking to play, but it's hard to picture anything without the fans," Carey said in an Instagram session with Delhi's official website. "It's going to be a hollow feeling, but I feel the fans will at least have some live cricket to look forward to on TV." — AFP

Closed door games for India series might help Australia

SYDNEY: Playing against India behind closed doors in the much-anticipated test series at the end of the year might end up being an advantage for the home side, according to Australia batsman Usman Khawaja.

Cricket Australia are desperate for the tour, scheduled for December and January, to go ahead as the lucrative Indian TV rights for the series would go a long way to easing a financial crisis triggered by the coronavirus pandemic.

India have said their players would be prepared to spend two weeks in quarantine in Australia if that helped but social-distancing restrictions might still keep fans locked out of the grounds.

Khawaja, though, thinks that might not necessarily be a disadvantage for the home side given how much noise Australia's significant South Asian community make when India tour Down Under.

"It's definitely an advantage" he told Fox Sports News with a laugh on Saturday. "I remember the last time they came over for a one-day series, the roar for India was much bigger."

"Especially in Melbourne, the amount of expats they have over there, they flock in. And when India's on top they really let you know it."

"It's a really weird feeling. When you're in India, you expect to be outnumbered massively but you can be outnumbered in Melbourne, as well as Sydney to some extent also."

Led by Virat Kohli, India secured their first ever test series triumph on Australian soil the last time they toured in the 2018-19 season.

The home side were, however, missing their two best batsmen as they served bans for their part in the Newlands ball-tampering scandal, and Khawaja said he thought their return would make for a different series this year.

"They were clearly the better team last time, we hung in there but (Cheteshwar) Pujara was outstanding and Kohli led from the front as a captain," he added.

"Their bowling unit was as good as I've ever seen an Indian bowling unit, they really went toe-to-toe with our bowlers. "Our bowlers are still in great form, though, and this time Steve Smith and Davy Warner will be in the side too, so a little bit of difference in the batting line-up." Islamabad-born Khawaja played all four tests against India in 2018-19 but will need to force his way back into the test side this year after missing out on a national contract a couple of weeks ago. — Reuters

18 Nike rivals play catch-up in marathon shoe wars



19 None more unbeatable than Djokovic at his best: Martin



19 Olympian's online workouts feed Philippines families



Silver gives players road map for future

Vanessa sues LA County sheriff over Kobe crash site photos



CHICAGO: File photo shows, NBA Commissioner Adam Silver speaks to the media during a press conference at the United Center in Chicago, Illinois. — AFP

LOS ANGELES: Adam Silver said Friday a decision on when the NBA can restart could come sometime in June with the league looking to play out of one or two hubs with Orlando and Las Vegas being the lead contenders.

Speaking in a conference call open to all NBA players and designed to update them on the league's status among the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown, the league commissioner was joined on the call by players' union executive director Michele Roberts.

Silver told the players that if there is no vaccine the league could end up playing with no fans in the stands into 2021, US media said.

He wants daily testing for all players and those testing positive quarantined. The games would go on with officials making sure the others were all constantly being monitored and tested.

With travel problematic amid social distancing and stay-at-home requirements in a number of American states, the league believes it would be safer to return to action in just one or two sites, with Orlando and Las Vegas being the frontrunners.

"There's no point in adding risk for flying all of you city to city if there's not going to be fans. We think it would be safer to be in a single location, or two locations, to start," he said in a recording of the call obtained by ESPN.

Silver also said one of the "single greatest chal-

lenges of our lives" was having fans in attendance because 40 percent of the NBA's revenues come from directly from the games through tickets, sponsorship deals and concessions.

He said all 30 owners are committed to resuming play and the league is leaning toward a minimum of three weeks of training camp ahead of the restart. But ESPN reported earlier Friday the idea of basing teams in a giant quarantined zone has been met with skepticism by the players.

The proposal floundered after they wondered how the zone would be policed to guarantee isolation. "When that one was first floated, there was some consternation," Roberts told ESPN before the call. "Are we going to arm guards around the hotel? That sounds like incarceration to me."

"So then, the players were like, 'Well, I don't know that it's worth it to be away from my family for that long. "We could do all that, and then what happens when one or two or 10 players test positive after that 28-day isolation? Do we shut it down?"

Reports last month said the NBA had studied the feasibility of staging the entirety of the post-season

in a locked down part of Las Vegas. The NBA has been in shutdown since the global pandemic brought sport to a standstill, forcing the suspension or postponement of every professional league in North America.

Silver also said Friday that when the NBA season was halted on March 11 after Utah Jazz center Rudy Gobert tested positive, Gobert wasn't the first player to be tested. He was just the first to test positive.

Friday's conference took place on the same day that teams are being allowed to re-open practice facilities for limited workouts, which will take place under strict safety protocols.

Meanwhile, Vanessa Bryant is suing the Los Angeles County sheriff's department over unauthorized photographs of the scene at the helicopter crash that killed her husband, NBA legend Kobe Bryant, and their 13-year-old daughter Gianna.

People magazine obtained the legal claim filed on Friday in which Vanessa Bryant seeks damages for emotional distress and mental anguish in the wake of revelations that eight sheriff's department deputies took graphic photos of the scene and shared them with others.

Kobe and Gianna Bryant were among nine people who died in the January 26 helicopter crash in the mountains west of Los Angeles. According to the court filing obtained by People, "no fewer than eight sheriff's deputies were at the scene snapping cell-phone photos of the dead children, parents, and coaches."

"As the Department would later admit, there was no investigative purpose for deputies to take pictures at the crash site. Rather, the deputies took photos for their own personal purposes."

The only people authorized to take pictures of the scene were investigators from the National Transportation Safety Board and the coroner's office. Sheriff Alex Villanueva acknowledged in March that deputies had taken photos of the crash scene, after the Los Angeles Times reported the existence of the pictures.

Entertainment news website TMZ.com reported then that a bartender had lodged a complaint after hearing a trainee sheriff's deputy showing the images to a customer in a bar.

Villanueva said in March that the department had identified the deputies involved and ensured that the photos were destroyed so that they could not be circulated further. At that time Vanessa Bryant asked for an internal affairs investigation and sanctions for all involved.—AFP

Barca return to training as La Liga eyes restart

MADRID: Barcelona returned to training on Friday after the La Liga champions allowed their stars to enter their facility to prepare for a potential restart to football in Spain. Lionel Messi and company took the fields at Joan Gamper training centre for individual sessions, for which the players arrived alone in kit

and took to the three pitches without passing through the changing rooms.

As well as doing their routines, they were also subjected to tests to see what effect two months of coronavirus quarantine has had on their bodies. "Finally we are getting back to normal. We hope to carry on and that soon we can get back to enjoying what we like to do most," Arturo Vidal told sports daily Marca.

Sevilla, Villarreal, Osasuna and Leganes also returned to training, while Real Madrid — who were two points behind league leaders Barca when play stopped in mid-March — will likely start again on Monday should their players pass virus tests carried out on Wednesday. That would mark almost two months since Real had been placed in quarantine fol-

lowing a positive test for a member of the club's basketball team. According to Spanish media, none of Real's players have suffered from virus symptoms, but Zinedine Zidane will have to do without Serb attacker Luka Jovic after Real announced on Friday he had fractured his right heel. Footballers in Spain have restarted training following the announcement last week of government plan that aims to end quarantine for professional players. Individual training sessions are the first step to what La Liga hopes will be a return to action in June that will complete the 2019-20 season behind closed doors.

The first aspect of a four-phase de-escalation programme allows a maximum of six players on the pitch at any one time. La Liga's programme will then permit

training in small groups before a return to larger team sessions.

In the fourth and final phase, in early June, the government has said outside events can go ahead when attended by fewer than 400 people.

League president Javier Tebas has said "it is not an option" to cancel the season given the economic fallout, estimating it would cost clubs around a billion euros (\$1.08 billion). On Thursday, Leganes coach Javier Aguirre said La Liga will resume on June 20 and end on July 26, although league bosses refused to confirm his claim they had told him the dates. "La Liga has just informed me officially and I am very happy about that because we have now scheduled the training sessions," Aguirre told Marca Claro. —AFP



With no fans in the stands