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**8** China's ground zero Wuhan reports new virus infections



**20** Sport bids to step out of coronavirus shadow



## Ramadan KAREEM

Fajr	03:29
Dhuhr	11:44
Asr	15:20
Maghrib	18:31
Isha	19:57



# Kuwaitis spared salary cuts; MP blames expat 'hoarders'

### Kuwait reports 7 deaths, 598 new virus cases • Assembly to hold emergency session



KUWAIT: The roads of downtown Kuwait City are eerily empty early in the afternoon during the first day of a total lockdown yesterday. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Rapporteur of the health and labor committee MP Saadoun Hammad said the panel agreed to include a new addition to proposed amendments to the labor law that would spare Kuwaiti employees from potential salary cuts in the sector. The government had proposed amendments to the labor law to allow distressed companies to reduce the salaries of their employees during the crisis after consulting with the ministry of social affairs.

The amendments were reviewed by the committee last week and as a result the government withdrew the bill to make some changes. Saadoun said the government has not completed the changes but he proposed to make a new addition to the bill calling to spare some 72,000 Kuwaitis employed in the private sector from any measures, and the committee agreed.

MP Safa Al-Hashem yesterday blamed some expatriates for the shopping rush ahead of the total lockdown, adding she was pleased with what Kuwaitis did "but most of the

chaos was by expats". She said that many expats purchased huge quantities and that some of them bought such quantities "with the intention to resell them". Health Minister Sheikh Basal Al-Sabah said yesterday that the lockdown measures will be reviewed after 10 days with a possibility of easing the measures, as he called on the public to abide by the measures.

The ministry of health yesterday announced 598 new coronavirus (COVID-19) infections in the last 24 hours, bringing the total to 9,286 cases, while seven deaths were reported as well, bringing fatalities up to 65. In its daily press briefing, Health Ministry Spokesperson Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said 131 patients are in intensive care. The ministry also announced the recovery of 178 patients, bringing the total to 2,907 recoveries. The new cases include 159 Indians, 140 Egyptians, 87 Bangladeshis, 79 Kuwaitis and the rest of other nationalities. Capital governorate recorded 74 cases, Hawally 131 cases, Ahmadi 93, Farwaniya governorate 256 cases and Jahra 44.

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## Saudi triples VAT, suspends handouts; fuel prices halved

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia unveiled plans yesterday to triple its value added tax and halt monthly allowances to citizens as part of a series of austerity measures amid record low oil prices and a coronavirus-led economic slump. The measures, which state media said would boost state coffers by 100 billion riyals (\$26.6 billion), come as the government steps up emergency plans to slash spending to deal with the twin economic blow.

The austerity drive could stir public resentment amid an already high cost of living and intensify scrutiny of lavish multi-billion dollar

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## 19 dead as Iran warship hit by 'friendly fire'

TEHRAN: An Iranian warship was hit by a friendly fire missile during naval exercises, killing 19 sailors, state media and the army said yesterday, amid tensions with the US in Gulf waters. The incident involving the Konarak vessel occurred on Sunday afternoon near Bandar-e Jask, off the southern coast of the Islamic republic, state television's website said. "The vessel was hit after moving a practice target to its destination and not creating enough distance between itself and the target," said the channel.

Nineteen crewmen were killed and 15 injured in an "accident" during the

exercises, the armed forces said, without elaborating. The vessel had been towed ashore for "technical investigations", it said in a statement, calling on people to "avoid speculation" until further information is released. Tasnim news agency said in an English-language tweet that the Konarak was hit by the missile fired by another Iranian warship. The vessel had been hit by "friendly fire" after Moudge-class frigate 'Jamaran' accidentally shot (it) with a missile during live firing exercise in Jask area of #PersianGulf waters".

The 15 injured were hospitalized in Sistan and Baluchistan, said Mohammad-Mehran Aminifard, head of the province's medical university. Two of the sailors were in intensive care, he told the semi-official news agency ISNA. Iran's army chief and foreign minister offered their

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JASK, Iran: A handout picture provided yesterday shows the damaged Konarak vessel, hit by a friendly fire missile during naval exercises, docked at Jask port in southern Hormozgan province. — AFP

## Italian rice puts pasta in shade during pandemic

ROBBIO, Italy: Europe's top rice producer Italy has seen consumption of the staple rise throughout the coronavirus pandemic, putting even pasta in the shade. It's not just popular at home either - China itself has even signed a deal to import Italian rice. The Chinese have their eyes on varieties used to make typical risotto dishes such as medium-grained Carnaroli, Arborio, Roma or Baldo. "It is because our rice is better quality than that cultivated in China," says Stefano Greppi, Pavia province president at Italy's main agricultural union Coldiretti.

Himself the owner of a nearby rice farm, Greppi welcomes the recent signing, during the pandemic, of an agreement allowing Italy, which produces more than half of European rice output, to export rice to China. That is

a boon for producers in the provinces of Pavia, Lombardy, Vercelli and Novara (both in Piedmont) which account between them for 95 percent of national production. "It's a bit like selling ice cream to the Eskimos," quipped daily Il Corriere della Sera the day after the export protocol was signed in April.

"The doors of the huge Chinese market are opening to rice (and risotto) cultivated in the countryside around Pavia," added the newspaper, explaining that "native imitations of Italian risotto" already exist in China. Spread over 2,200 hectares and cultivated by 42,000 producers in all, Italian rice production totals an annual 1.5 million tons. The country boasts more than 200 varieties in all, each with its own peculiarities.

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## Europe begins reopening; Asia infections spike

PARIS: Swaths of Europe began the long process of re-opening from coronavirus lockdowns yesterday, but the first new infections in weeks at China's ground zero offered a sobering reminder of the dangers of a second wave of cases. The mixed fortunes illustrated the high-wire act governments face across the globe as they try to get economies moving while keeping in check a pandemic that has now killed more than 280,000 people.

As Britain plotted a path to normality and France and Spain basked in a relaxation of restrictions, the Chinese city where the pandemic was born reported a second day of new cases after a month without sign of the virus. And neighboring South Korea announced its highest number of infections for more than a month



ALLAHABAD, India: Migrant laborers carry their belongings as they walk on the roadside to reach their hometown by foot during a government-imposed nationwide lockdown as a preventive measure against the coronavirus yesterday. — AFP

driven by a cluster in a Seoul nightlife district. With millions out of work and economies shattered, governments are desperate to hit the accelerator, but most are choosing a gradual approach as fears about a resurgence of the virus linger.

In Britain, Prime Minister Boris Johnson

said it was too soon for the country to lift its lockdown but he offered hope by unveiling a "conditional plan" to ease curbs in England during the months ahead. Johnson said the restrictions had brought "a colossal cost to our way of life" but it

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# Kuwait FM delivers message from Amir to Qatari Amir

## Deputy FM receives message from Iranian president to Amir



DOHA: Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani meets with Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Mohammad Al-Sabah. — KUNA photos



Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Mohammad Al-Sabah meets with Qatar's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammad Al Thani.

DOHA/KUWAIT: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Mohammad Al-Sabah conveyed a verbal message from His Highness the Amir Sheikh

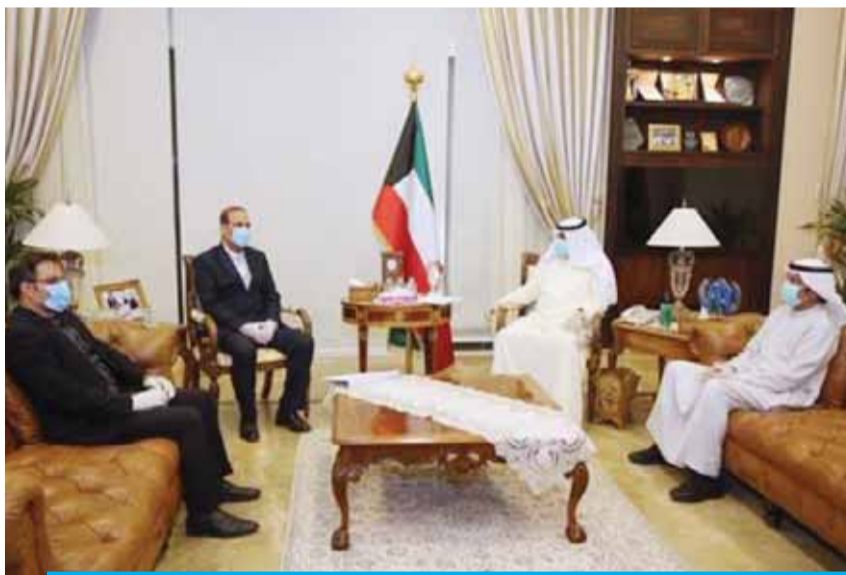
Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, in Doha on Sunday. The message deals with ways of further cementing and developing bilateral relations, as well as issues of mutual interest, Kuwait's foreign ministry said in a statement. Sheikh Dr Ahmad also met with Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammad Al Thani, it added.

Separately, Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah on Sunday received a message from the Iranian ambassador to the State of Kuwait Mohammad Irani. The message is addressed to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

from Iranian President Hassan Rouhani. The deputy foreign minister and the Iranian ambassador, during the meeting, discussed bilateral relations, developments on regional and international arenas in light of spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). Meanwhile, Jarallah on Sunday met the French charge d'affaires to the State of Kuwait Elisabeth Barbier, discussing bilateral relations and regional and international developments in light of efforts against the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). The meetings were attended by the assistant foreign minister for the deputy foreign minister bureau's affairs, Ambassador Ayham Al-Omar. — KUNA



## Jarallah meets French diplomat



Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah meets with Iranian ambassador to the State of Kuwait Mohammad Irani.



Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah meets with the French charge d'affaires to the State of Kuwait Elisabeth Barbier.

## Coronavirus in Kuwait: What we know so far

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait has recorded 8,688 cases infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) as of Sunday, in addition to 58 deaths. With the exception of 114 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, 2,729 people have recovered completely after previously being infected with the virus, while there are 4,952 people receiving treatment and 4,715 quarantined.

### 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 and supermarkets once every six days during the curfew hours by making an appointment through [www.moci.shop](http://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](http://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](http://www.pai.gov.kw), and send the

form via email to: [Jasiri@moh.gov.kw](mailto: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. Kuwait took all measures to test Kuwaitis repatriated from infected areas for potential infection. Kuwait had required all expatriates who arrived from travel on March 1 and beyond to visit Kuwait International Fairground where the Ministry of Health has set up a center to test people for possible infection. Meanwhile, the Cabinet announced on April 9 the operation of all airline flights for expats who are wishing to return back to their countries. Authorities also announced a public holiday in the country from March 12 to May 28, with work resuming on May 31, while entities providing vital services will remain open. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education has suspended classes for March at all public and private schools (for both students and teaching staffs); first from March 1 to March 12, and later extended it until March 29, before eventually suspending schools until August for grade 12 and October for other stages. State departments have been on high alert to take precautions against the potential spread of the virus. The Ministry of Commerce and Industry has taken measures to make sure that facial masks, hand sanitizers and other goods remain accessible to the public.

Kuwait suspended issuing entry permits and visas unless those issued through diplomatic missions. The Interior Ministry issued an amnesty allowing residency violators to leave the country between April 1 and April 30 without paying any fines or airfare with a chance to return to Kuwait later. The amnesty was issued in view of the circumstances the country is currently going through and as part of the precautionary measures taken to fight the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). During the amnesty period, individuals desiring to procure valid residencies in Kuwait and were willing to pay the fines without being subjected to investigations were allowed to pay the fines and legalize their status if they meet the required conditions.

### Hotlines

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

The Education Ministry set the following hotlines to receive inquiries on school closures related to the anti-coronavirus measures:

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

### Medicine delivery

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

- Amiri Hospital: 50880699
- Mubarak Al-Kabeer Hospital: 50880755
- Farwaniya Hospital: 50880852
- Adan Hospital: 50880908
- Jahra Hospital: 50881066
- Sabah Hospital: 97632660
- Jaber Hospital: 96992079
- Ibn Sina Hospital: 99613948
- Chest Hospital: 99258749
- Razi Hospital: 97633487
- Kuwait Cancer Control Center: 96735242
- Psychiatric Hospital: 97350113
- Physiotherapy Hospital: 99824037
- Maternity Hospital: 98559531

### Mental health assistance

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

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

For information and other concerns, call 9401-4283.

In My View

## COVID-19: Staying at home



By Abdellatif Sharaa

[local@kuwaittimes.com](mailto:local@kuwaittimes.com)

Now it is obvious that COVID-19 is hanging on tough, and is infecting people one way or another despite efforts exerted by many governments, and Kuwait is no exception. Countries are making progress, but just one mistake and no compliance by some people have caused setbacks, and the numbers took the curve to higher levels.

There is no denial that COVID-19 imposed its own curfew on people by limiting their movement, making them spend time at home and changed the style of living of communities. Economies around the world were rattled as the spread of infection continued, making people sad and down on themselves. There are those who are already suffering from depression and other related conditions.

A report on the BBC spoke about preemptive moves that can be taken daily to improve the mood, even during times when worries and fears are high. Many international experts in psychology have given practical daily advice to help in dealing with psychological stress in a better way. Some of the best pieces of advice may be surprising due to their simplicity.

When you become concerned with a certain issue that brings fear to you, be it the spread of the novel coronavirus, climate change or any other issue, you will find yourself compelled to follow the news and its development almost all the time. Yet a study showed that reviewing the incident that causes stress over and over again is linked to hypertension and low mood conditions, so diverting attention and ceasing to think about the reasons for the stress may help reduce hypertension to normal rates.

One important thing that we must be aware of - although meditation may help many overcome psychological pressure, it may increase anxiety and tension in others. Some people may consider meditation as an opportunity to ruminate on negative ideas and may find it difficult to stop thinking about the incidents causing anxiety and psychological pressure when attempting to clear their minds, and it may be better for them to divert attention to other necessary matters.

**Final word:** "Hope is the strength by which a shattered world shall emerge into the light." — Anon

Local

# Interior Minister urges servicemen to implement curfew in decisive manner

## Charges filed against volunteer for beating worker

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

**KUWAIT:** Deputy Premier and Interior Minister Anas Al-Saleh called Sunday on servicemen to deal in a decisive manner with people violating the full curfew that entered force on Sunday. "Government resolutions achieve security of citizens and expatriates, and safeguard their safety and wellbeing," Saleh, also Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs, said during a meeting with security and military leaders. The meeting aimed at following up implementation of the full curfew which aimed at curbing spread of the novel coronavirus, the Ministry of Interior said in a statement. The meeting touched upon deployment of security and military personnel nationwide to make sure the curfew was properly implemented, and to monitor violations, added the statement. Saleh commended the deployment of the

servicemen, and urged them to be vigilant, it said. The meeting was attended by Kuwait Army chief of Staff General Mohammad Al-Khodhr, MoI's Undersecretary General Essam Al-Nahham, Undersecretary of Kuwait National Guard General Hashem Al-Rifae and Director General of Kuwait Fire Services Directorate General Khaled Al-Mekrad.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Interior said Sunday it filed charges against a volunteer who was seen on video while assaulting a gas station worker. The ministry said it summoned the volunteer - whose name, nationality nor age were disclosed - after a video circulated on social media showing him beating a worker of the gas station. Security authorities called the volunteer and filed charges against him, it said.

In other news, police arrested a businessman with possession of one million Captagon tablets, the interior ministry announced. A firearm was also found



**KUWAIT:** This photo released by the Interior Ministry shows a businessman arrested with possession of one million Captagon tablets.

with the suspect. The man was taken to the proper authorities for questioning on drug possession, trafficking and other charges.



### Drug dealer arrested

## KRCS delivers aid to poor in Lebanon



**BEIRUT:** Kuwait Red Crescent Society on Sunday distributed relief supplies to poor Lebanese and Syrian families in various regions of the country. The relief coordinator at the Lebanese Red Cross, Yousef Boutros, said that the KRCS started delivering the needed supplies

to 4,400 Lebanese and Syrian families, in coordination with the KRCS and the Kuwait embassy in Lebanon. He affirmed significance of the humanitarian initiatives by the Kuwaiti leadership and people that came at a time the Lebanese people and the Syrian refugees suffered from



hard living conditions. These hardships have been aggravated with outbreak of the coronavirus. Need for essential supplies particularly increases during holy month of Ramadan. The KRCS sponsors a number of humanitarian programs in Lebanon. — KUNA

## Medical supplies arrive from China

**KUWAIT:** A Kuwaiti military aircraft arrived in China's Quanzhou International Airport Sunday to ship out medical supplies as part of air bridge between the two countries. In a statement to the press, Kuwait's Ambassador to China Sameeh Hayat affirmed that the plane was the 10th in the

schedule of providing the country with medical supplies to enhance its strategic stock. "Each shipment carries approximately 50 to 55 tons of medical and preventive supplies," he pointed out. Hayat noted that this trip came as part of a series of efforts and tasks carried out by the Ministry

of Defense, thanks for its cooperation and permanent coordination with the Ministry of Health, with the aim of providing various medical equipment during such health conditions that the country and the world as a whole are going through. — KUNA



The medical supplies are being loaded on a plane to be shipped to Kuwait.



### News in brief

#### Hyperlink for medical permits

**KUWAIT:** The Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI) issued on Sunday the hyperlink, enabling individuals to obtain medical permits during the lockdown, which lasts until May 30. A press release by PACI revealed that the link (<https://curfew.paci.gov.kw>) will allow individuals to gain permits for hospitals and clinics. Those violating the conditions of obtaining permits will face legal action, it affirmed.

#### Elderly shopping

**KUWAIT:** The Ministry of Commerce announced that starting from yesterday, elderly people can book an appointment to shop from co-operative societies by calling 101 from 9 am till 9 pm. The appointment booking service is also available online at [www.moci.shop](http://www.moci.shop).

#### Expats' flights

**KUWAIT:** The Directorate General of Civil Aviation announced that five flights were scheduled to depart Kuwait International Airport yesterday. They include one flight to Doha, three flights to Egypt, and one flight to Syria, with a total of 930 passengers. Meanwhile, the civil aviation authority announced that expatriates' evacuation is continuing from Kuwait International Airport, as 128 flights have been operated since March carrying 19,042 expats.

## Municipality allows home delivery of groceries

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Municipality announced yesterday that grocery stores are permitted to deliver foodstuffs and other commodities to nearby residents during the full curfew enacted Sunday afternoon. The permission is based on a decision by the cabinet in this regard, the municipality said in a statement on Monday. No vehicle can be used in the home delivery of groceries, it said, noting that the grocery stores are not allowed to receive shoppers. It affirmed that only the grocery stores located in investment areas could benefit from the decision and deliver items to consumers during the morning shift (from 8:00 am. to 4:00 pm) and the night shift (from 8:00 pm to 1:30 am). The municipality highlighted the need of continued commitment by the grocery workers to the public health regulations, including putting on facemask and gloves. It noted that it welcomes complaints or inquiries via the WhatsApp number 65965744. — KUNA

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed

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# Cooking gas supplies sufficient for the long haul: KOTC



KUWAIT: People queue in front of a shop to refill their gas cylinders in Kuwait City on May 10, 2020, a day after Kuwaiti authorities announced a 20-day total lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



KUWAIT: Kuwait has taken all necessary precautions with relevant authorities to ensure steady supplies of gas canisters to customers. Kuwait Oil Tankers Company (KOTC) said in a statement on Sunday that

it has stockpiles of liquefied gas canisters sufficient for the local market for a long time. The company plants are pursuing their strategic role for meeting the state needs for gas. People had rushed to cooking gas can-

ister shops at co-operative societies on Saturday and Sunday, as a panic-buying wave hit the country as soon as the cabinet announced on Friday a total curfew from Sunday afternoon until the end of the month.

Large crowds of people were seen at major food, grocery and other outlets during the two days leading to the curfew, hampering government efforts to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

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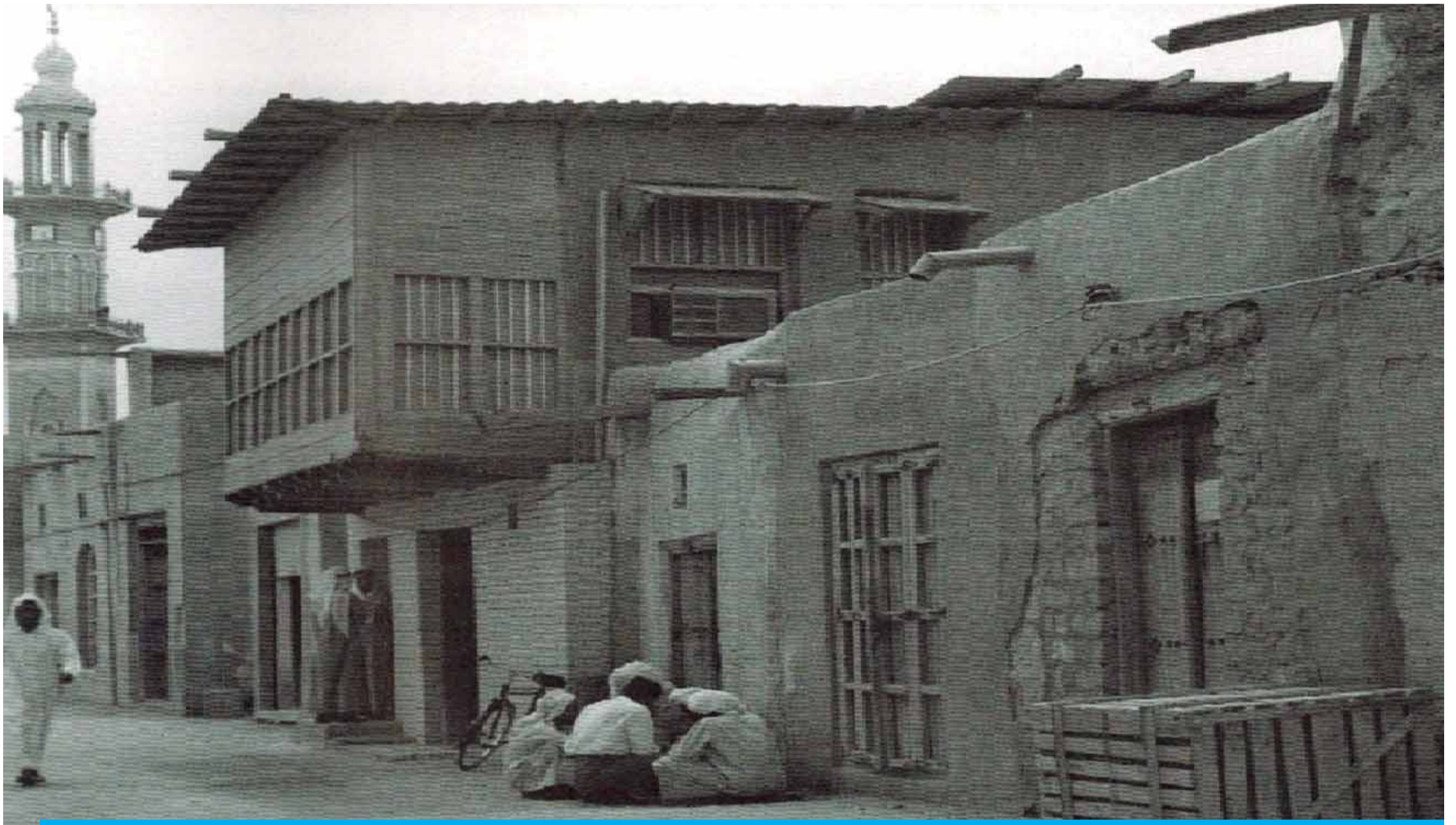
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KUWAIT: Long lines of people queue in front of bakeries, co-op societies and currency exchange offices in Kuwait on Sunday, a day after Kuwaiti authorities announced a 20-day total lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. —Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh and Yasser Al-Zayyat

## Local

## Kuwait Heritage



KUWAIT: A scene from the old times showing Kuwaitis' aspects of simple daily life, including architecture and people's clothing. (Source: Kuwait in Black and White by: Basem Aloujani, 2008. Researched by Mohammed Zakaria Abu Ella, Researcher in Heritage, the Ministry of Information)

# Ooredoo distributes Girgian gifts to frontliners at Jaber Hospital

## And to its customers in collaboration with Talabat

**KUWAIT:** Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, celebrated Girgian differently this year amid the ongoing COVID-19 situation in the country. The Company distributed Girgian gifts to frontline staff at Sheikh Jaber Hospital; stemming from its Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives and its commitment to supporting the government and its entities. Ooredoo, in collaboration with Talabat, was also keen on celebrating Girgian with its customers during these unprecedented times by delivering a Girgian gift with every order placed across Kuwait. This initiative comes to reiterate Ooredoo's commitment to joining all segments of society in the events that matter to them the most.

Commenting on this initiative, Senior Director of Corporate Communications at Ooredoo Kuwait, Mijbil Al-Ayoub noted that this initiative is in alignment with the Company's Corporate Social Responsibility strategy to support the society at all times throughout the year, and across all sectors. This has been Ooredoo Kuwait's strategy since day one, and the company is committed to provide society and the nation with all the support needed under any circumstances.

It is worth mentioning that Ooredoo Kuwait has reaffirmed its full support of the government and its entities in light of the COVID-19 outbreak in the country through an array of initiatives while ensuring that customers are staying home as per Government directives. The company reaffirmed its support by collaborating with the Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA) by providing customers with free 5GB internet and free calls for one month. At the beginning of the outbreak, the company gifted its customers in Ministries and Governmental Organizations which include the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Interior, Civil Defense, Kuwait Police, Kuwait Airways and the Directorate General of Civil Aviation free internet valid throughout the month of March in appreciation for their great efforts during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) situation in the country.

Ooredoo Kuwait also provided its services to the Kuwait Union of Consumer Co-operative Societies and to the General Directorate of Civil Defense. And under the umbrella of Corporate Social Responsibility, Ooredoo Kuwait gifted all mothers under health quarantine and the medical staff treating them at Sheikh Jaber Hospital on the occasion of Mother's Day; in addition to gifting all patients under health quarantine and the



Mijbil Al-Ayoub

staff treating them at Aqua Marine Resort, Sea Shell Resort, and Khalifa Resort. This included staff from the Ministry of Health, Council of Ministers, and the Red Crescent Society. The company also gifted SIM cards which included free internet and free calls to citizens returning to Kuwait on repatriation flights to use during the medical quarantine period.

Ooredoo Kuwait has recently launched the ProPing Online Gaming Tournament, in which gaming enthusiasts compete in the online game 'Call of Duty- Modern Warfare' from their homes in a purely digital environment. The tournament is aligned with the company's 'Be Safe. Be Home. Be Online' campaign. The campaign features an array of digital offers and services designed to support customers and to ensure they are well connected and informed during the Coronavirus outbreak in the country. The digital offers and services provided by Ooredoo Kuwait include subscription to any Ooredoo Surprise offer on My Ooredoo App, enjoying the best music, series, movies, and games, recharging online, joining ANA and free SIM delivery to customers' doorsteps, and amazing benefits from Shamel. Customers can also view Ooredoo's services as well as exclusive offers and their subscription data online through the MyOoredoo application and the Company website Ooredoo.com.kw in addition to contacting our call center through 121 around the clock for all enquiries and services.

Ooredoo Kuwait reaffirms its keenness to adhere to all instructions issued by the official authorities in Kuwait related to the current situation, confirming its cooperation and its complete readiness to implement the procedures followed in this regard during the coming period.

## Supplications for Ramadan

By Dr Teresa

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "Three supplications will not be rejected (by Almighty God), the supplication of the parent for his child, the supplication of the one who is fasting, and the supplication of the traveler. [at-Tirmidhi]. Because Ramadan is the month of fasting, it is one of the best times to supplicate to our Creator for whatever our hearts desire. Allah says in the Quran, "When My servants ask you concerning Me, I am indeed close: I respond to the dua of every suppliant when they call on Me" (2:186). We should take care to ask our Creator for things that are really important and valuable, not things that may eventually lead us to wrongdoing. God has given us some good suggestions of what to pray for, such as the following ones taken from the Quran.

1. Our Lord! Grant us good in this world and good in the life to come and keep us safe from the torment of the Fire (2:201)
2. Our Lord! Bestow on us endurance and make our foothold sure and give us help against those who reject faith. (2:250)
3. Our Lord! Take us not to task if we forget or fall into error. (2:286)
4. Our Lord! Lay not upon us such a burden as You did lay upon those before us. (2:286)
5. Our Lord! Impose not on us that which we have not the strength to bear, grant us forgiveness and have mercy on us. You are our Protector. Help us against those who deny the truth. (7:126)
6. Our Lord! Let not our hearts deviate from the truth after You have guided us, and bestow upon us mercy from Your grace. Verily You are the Giver of bounties without measure. (3:8)
7. Our Lord! Forgive us our sins and the lack of moderation in our doings, and make firm our steps and succor us against those who deny the truth. (3:147)
8. Our Lord! Forgive us our sins and efface our bad deeds and take our souls in the company of the righteous. (3:193)
9. Our Lord! Place us not among the people who have been guilty of evildoing. (7:47)
10. Our Lord! Pour out on us patience and constancy, and make us die as those who have surrendered themselves unto You. (7:126)
11. Our Lord! Make us not a trial for the evildoing folk, and save as by Your mercy from people who deny the truth (10:85-86)
12. Our Lord! Bestow on us mercy from Your presence and dispose of our affairs for us in the right way. (18:10)
13. Our Lord! Grant that our spouses and our offspring be a comfort to our eyes, and give us the grace to lead those who are conscious of You. (25:74)
14. Our Lord! Forgive us our sins as well as those of our brethren who preceded us in faith and let not our hearts entertain any unworthy thoughts or feelings against [any of]

those who have believed. Our Lord! You are indeed full of kindness and Most Merciful (59:10)

15. Our Lord! In You we have placed our trust, and to You do we turn in repentance, for unto You is the end of all journeys. (60:4)

16. Our Lord! Perfect our light for us and forgive us our sins, for verily You have power over all things. (66:8)

17. Our Lord! Accept this from us. Indeed, you are the Hearing, the Knowing. (2:127) Our Lord, and make us Muslims, [in submission] to you, and from our descendants a Muslim nation to you. And show us our rites [of hajj and umra] and accept our repentance. Indeed, you are the accepting of repentance, the Merciful. (2:128)

18. You are our Protector, so forgive us and have mercy upon us; and You are the best of forgivers. (7:155)

19. And decree for us in this world [that which is] good and in the Hereafter; indeed we have turned back to you. (7:156)

20. Creator of the heavens and earth, you are my protector in this world and the Hereafter. Cause me to die a Muslim and join me with the righteous. (12:101)

21. My Lord, make me an establisher of prayer, and [many] from my descendants. Our Lord, and accept my supplication. (14:40)

22. Our Lord, forgive me and my parents and the believers the day the account is established. (14:41)

23. My Lord, have mercy upon [my parents] as they brought me up [when I was] small. (17:24)

24. My Lord, increase me in knowledge. (20:114)

25. My Lord, I seek refuge in You from the incitements of the devils and I seek refuge in You my Lord, lest they be present with me. (23:97-98)

26. Our Lord, we have believed, so forgive us and have mercy upon us, and You are the Best of the merciful. (23:109)

27. Our Lord, avert from us the punishment of Hell. Indeed, its punishment is ever adhering. Indeed, it is evil as a settlement and residence. (25:65-66)

28. My Lord, grant me authority and join me with the righteous. And grant me a mention [reputation] of honor among later generations. And place me among the inheritors of the Garden of Pleasure. (25:83-85)

29. And do not disgrace me on the day they are [all] resurrected, the day when there will not benefit [anyone] wealth or children, but only one who comes to Allah with a sound heart. 26:87-89

30. My Lord, inspire me to be grateful for your favor which you have bestowed upon me and upon my parents and to do righteousness of which you approve. And admit me by Your mercy into [the ranks of] your righteous servants. (27:19)

31. My Lord, enable me to be grateful for your favor which You have bestowed upon me and my parents and to work righteousness of which you will approve and make righteous for me my offspring. Indeed, I have repented to You, and indeed, I am of the Muslims. (46:15)

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



Girgian with every order

# International

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Wuhan reports first coronavirus cluster

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TAEZ: Members of Yemen's Southern Transitional Council (STC) secure a convoy of medical aid received by sea shipment from the United Arab Emirates as it drives through Bab Al-Mandab in Taz province on the way to the war-torn country's second city of Aden in southern Yemen.—AFP

# Yemen declares Aden 'infested' city

## Coronavirus spreads, cases jump to 35, with four deaths

**ADEN:** Yemeni authorities declared Aden, interim seat of the Saudi-backed government, an "infested" city yesterday after the number of coronavirus cases there jumped to 35, with four deaths. A five-year war has shattered Yemen's health system, pushed millions to the brink of famine and divided the country between the internationally recognized government and the Houthi group that ousted it from power in the capital, Sanaa, in late 2014. The Aden-based national coronavirus committee late on Sunday announced 17 new COVID-19 cases, 10 of them in the southern port city, to raise the total count in areas under the Saudi-backed government's control to 51 with eight deaths.

The Houthi movement, which controls Sanaa and most large urban centres, has only reported two cases, with one death. The Aden-based government

has accused Houthi authorities of covering up an outbreak in Sanaa, an accusation they deny. The World Health Organization says there is full-blown transmission of the virus in Yemen, whose population has some of the lowest levels of immunity to disease compared with other countries. Testing capabilities are inadequate.

The Aden-based committee said Aden had been declared an "infested city" due to the spread of the coronavirus and other diseases after recent flooding. It said movement from Aden to other regions was barred with the exception of the transport of goods. "The administrative and po-

litical situation in Aden is also hampering efforts to combat the coronavirus and this should be remedied so relevant entities can carry out their duties," the committee said on its Twitter account.



### War shatters Yemen health system

Yemen's multifaceted war. The separatist Southern Transitional Council and the government of Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi are both part of the anti-Houthi coalition led by Saudi Arabia, but they turned on each

other last year until Riyadh brokered a deal in late November. Yemen has been mired in violence since the Western-backed coalition intervened in March 2015 against the Iran-aligned Houthi movement to restore Hadi's government to power in Sanaa.

The coalition had on April 24 extended by one month a nationwide ceasefire prompted by the coronavirus outbreak as the United Nations seeks to hold virtual talks to agree a permanent truce, coordinate coronavirus efforts and restart peace talks. The conflict, largely seen in the region as a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran, has killed more than 100,000, left 80% of the population, or 24 million, reliant on aid and some 10 million facing hunger. The Houthis, who say they are fighting a corrupt system, have not formally accepted the truce though violence has abated.— Reuters

## What lockdown changes did UK's PM announce?

**LONDON:** Prime Minister Boris Johnson has announced that there would be no immediate end to lockdown in Britain, but he outlined plans to begin gradually easing some of the measures which have shut down much of the economy for nearly seven weeks. Following are some of the changes he announced, with further details due to be announced to parliament on Monday:

### Slogan

The government is replacing its main "stay at home" slogan with "stay alert". Government officials have said, however, that people will still be told to stay at home as much as possible.

### Contact with others

In a government poster published by Johnson on Twitter on Sunday, the new guidelines included "limit contact with other people". A government official said there was no change in the advice for the most vulnerable people, who have been asked to shield themselves, but others could, for example, sit next to a friend in the park as long as social distancing measures were respected. Johnson said fines for breaking social distancing measures would be increased. The fine is now expected to be 100 pounds, halved to 50 pounds if paid within 14 days.

### Exercise

From Wednesday, people will be allowed to take unlimited amounts of outdoor exercise, sit in the sun in a local park, drive to other destinations and play sports, such as golf, tennis or angling, but only with members of their household.

### Return to work

Johnson said those who can work from home should continue to do so but anyone who cannot, such as those working in construction and manufacturing, "should be actively encouraged to go to work".

### Schools/Shops

Johnson said that at the earliest by June 1, Britain might be in a position to begin the phased



LONDON: A family gather around the television to watch Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson give a televised message to the nation in Hartley Wintney, west of London as the government sets out its roadmap to ease the national lockdown due to the novel coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic.—AFP

reopening of shops and to get primary pupils back into schools, in stages, beginning with the youngest and oldest year groups. A government official said the government would want to see the other years going back to school before the summer holidays. "Our ambition is that secondary pupils facing exams next year will get at least some time with their teachers before the holidays. And we will shortly be setting out detailed guidance on how to make it work in schools and shops and on transport," Johnson said. Other year classes in secondary schools are not expected to return to school before the summer holidays.

### Hospitality

At the earliest by July and if the numbers on infection rates support it, Johnson said there could be the re-opening of at least some of the hospitality industry and other public places, provided they are safe and enforce social distancing. Some of the hospitality industry could include restaurants or cafes with outside seating and public places could include places of worship.

### Transport

The requirement for buses, trains and underground rail services to maintain social distancing rules means they will only be able to carry vastly reduced passenger numbers, with public transport capacity expected to drop by around 90%. Johnson urged those returning to commuting to con-

sider cycling, walking or driving to work instead.

### Warning system

Johnson said the government was establishing a new Covid Alert System run by a new Joint Biosecurity Centre. The Covid Alert Level will be determined primarily by the reproduction rate of the disease, or R, and the number of coronavirus cases. There will be five alert levels. Level One means the disease is no longer present in Britain and Level Five is the most critical and be used to flag the risk in different areas, allowing the government to tighten restrictions where necessary.

### Quarantine arrivals

Johnson said to prevent re-infection from abroad "it will soon be the time ... to impose quarantine on people coming into this country by air." In a joint statement issued following a conversation between Johnson and French President Emmanuel Macron, France and Britain said no quarantine measures would apply to travellers coming from France for now and "any measures on either side would be taken in a concerted and reciprocal manner".

### Scotland

Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said the only change she would be making to lockdown measures in Scotland would be to allow people to exercise more than once a day from Monday.— Reuters

## 4 killed in rocket attacks as Turkey warns Haftar

**TRIPOLI:** Libya's Government of National Accord said Sunday at least four civilians, including a child, were killed as rockets rained down on the capital Tripoli and damaged its only working airport. The UN-recognized GNA blamed Saturday's attacks on eastern strongman Khalifa Haftar, who has been waging a campaign to take control of the capital since April last year.

GNA supporter Turkey, for its part, warned that it would target Haftar's forces if attacks continued on Ankara's missions and "interests", citing the airport. Haftar's forces "fired more than a hundred rockets and missiles at residential areas in the centre of the capital", the GNA said in a statement on Facebook. At least four civilians, including a five-year-old girl, were killed and 16 others wounded in the working-class districts of Abu Slim and Ben Gashir, south of the city, the GNA's health ministry spokesman Amin al-Hashemi said.

Dozens of rockets also targeted Mitiga airport, hitting a civilian aircraft lined up to repatriate Libyans stuck abroad due to the coronavirus pandemic, the GNA statement added. Turkey warned that Haftar's forces would become "legitimate targets" if such attacks continued. Overnight Thursday to Friday, rockets fell on Tripoli's Zawiyat al-Dahmani neighborhood, which is home to the GNA foreign ministry and the Italian and Turkish embassies.

At least two policemen and one civilian were killed, Hashemi said at the time. "We stress that if our missions and interests are targeted in Libya, Haftar's forces will be considered legitimate targets," the Turkish foreign ministry said. "The attacks on diplomatic missions including our Tripoli embassy, Mitiga airport, civilian planes preparing to take off and other civilian infrastructure, and those which kill civilians or injure them, constitute a war crime," it added.

Mitiga airport was badly damaged Saturday and came under renewed rocket fire on Sunday morning. An airport source said the passenger halls and two civilian planes sustained serious damage. Images of an aircraft with its fuselage ripped open and of a badly damaged runway and airport buildings were posted on social media. Libya's National Oil Corporation (NOC) said Saturday that rockets and missiles hit a fuel depot at the airport, destroying four tanks and damaging the facility's other six.

The United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) called the bombardment "an all too familiar but frightening spectacle". "These horrifying attacks occur on a regular basis in close proximity to civilian neighborhoods," UNSMIL said on Twitter. It called the shelling "one in a series of indiscriminate attacks, most of which are attributable to pro-LNA (Haftar) forces, killing more than 15 and injuring 50 civilians since 1 May".

Since Wednesday, 17 civilians and two police officers have been killed and more than 66 other civilians wounded in rocket fire targeting several areas of the capital, according to the GNA. UNSMIL slammed the attacks hitting civilians and civilian infrastructure and called for "those responsible for crimes under international law to be brought to justice". But the GNA said international condemnation was not enough. "We no longer pay any attention to the timid condemnations of the international community, incapable as it is of naming" Haftar, holding him to account or stopping those supporting him, the GNA said. "The senseless acts... of the past days... are proof of his weakness and desperation after the successive defeats of his militias and mercenaries," it added. Haftar's forces have suffered several setbacks in recent weeks, with GNA fighters ousting them from two key coastal cities west of Tripoli in April.—AFP

## International

## France, Spain ease virus lockdowns but UK wary

## Fears of a 'second wave' of the pandemic

PARIS: Millions of people in France and Spain embraced a relaxation of stay-at-home rules yesterday, but Britain extended its lockdown as countries plot their way tentatively through the coronavirus crisis. Fears of a second wave of the pandemic, which has killed more than 280,000 people worldwide and wrecked the global economy, stalked much of Europe and the world.

With millions out of work and economies flatlining - including in the United States, where 20 million people lost their jobs in April - governments are desperate to reopen, but most are choosing a gradual approach. In France, people morning were able to walk outside without filling in a permit for the first time in nearly eight weeks, teachers will start to return to primary schools, and some shops - including hair salons - will reopen.

Bars, restaurants, theatres and cinemas will, however, remain closed. Spaniards outside of urban hotspots such as Madrid and Barcelona - which remain under lockdown - made plans to meet friends and family in bars and restaurants that have outdoor spaces. But Prime Minister Boris Johnson said it was too soon for Britain to do the same. Almost seven weeks after a nationwide stay-at-home order was put in place, more than 31,800 have died during the outbreak in Britain - the worst toll in Europe and second only to the United States.

#### 'Colossal cost'

Johnson, who himself spent a week in hospital with COVID-19, said on Sunday the measures had come "at a colossal cost to our way of life" but added it would be "madness" to squander the progress by moving too soon. "This is not the time simply to end the lockdown this week," the 55-year-old said, but he unveiled a "conditional

plan" to ease the measures in England in the months ahead.

Some European officials have been emboldened by declining death rates: France's toll of 70 on Sunday was its lowest since early April, and Spain's daily fatalities have dropped below 200. But the risk of a second wave was underscored by a resurgence in South Korea. Although widely praised for its handling of its initial outbreak, the country has been forced to shut all bars and clubs in the capital Seoul after a cluster of infections.

China on Sunday reported its first infection in over a month in Wuhan, where the outbreak first started late last year before going on to infect more than four million worldwide. There was uncertainty in Germany, too, with at least one district forced to

reimpose restrictions after an outbreak at a meat processing plant. And even as the country loosened its lockdown restrictions, the latest German data also indicated the infection rate was rising again.

#### Bustling bazaars

In Spain, however, they were getting ready to celebrate. "We have already set a date for dinner on Wednesday, just 10 of us. I can't wait to touch someone, to kiss and be kissed," said 66-year-old Beatriz Gonzalez in the Spanish city of Las Palmas in the Canary Islands. Belgium and Greece are among other European nations set to ease lockdowns. Turkey had already eased some restrictions and let over-65s out for the first time on Sunday. Iran, the Middle East's worst-hit country, has also relaxed its lockdown measures, and bazaars and shopping centres in the capital Tehran were bustling again after being nearly deserted for weeks.

But health ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour warned the situation "should in no way be considered normal," as one region recorded a spike in death rates and reimposed a lockdown. And the resumption of league football in Europe was dealt a blow after confirmation of infection clusters among players in Spain, Germany and Portugal. Football bosses in all three countries, however, insisted that season restarts planned for the coming weeks were still on track.

#### Jet-skiing president

Russia and Brazil both passed grim milestones at the weekend. Russia's caseload surpassed 200,000 and is expected to become the highest figure in Europe within days, even as the number of deaths

remains relatively low at fewer than 2,000. While officials say the figures reveal the effectiveness of Russia's testing regime, an opposition-allied doctors union said the authorities were under-reporting deaths of medics.

For Brazil, the signs are more ominous. Officials confirmed more than 10,000 had now died in the hardest-hit Latin American country. Scientists warned that the real figures could be many times higher, given a lack of widespread testing. In a sign that officials were not yet facing up to the crisis, President Jair Bolsonaro, who has likened the coronavirus to a "little flu" and criticized regional lockdowns, was reportedly seen jet skiing.

## Rise in German virus infections spurs concern

BERLIN: Germany's coronavirus spread appears to be picking up speed again, official data showed Sunday, just days after Chancellor Angela Merkel said the country could gradually return to normal. The Robert Koch Institute for public health said Germany's closely watched reproduction rate (R0) had climbed to 1.1, meaning 10 people with COVID-19 infect on average 11 others. The RKI has warned that for the infection rate to be deemed under control and slowing down, the R0 has to stay below one.†

As recently as Wednesday, Germany's number stood at 0.65. But since then the country has reported clusters of new cases at slaughterhouses and at care homes for the elderly. The RKI cautioned it was too soon to draw conclusions but said the number of new infections "would need to be watched very closely in the coming days". The latest data raised alarm after Merkel only on Wednesday declared that Germany had left the "first phase" of the pandemic behind it and federal states announced relaxations of social restrictions.

Most shops and playgrounds have reopened, children are gradually returning to classrooms and states

are to varying degrees reopening restaurants, gyms and places of worship. German local authorities have however agreed to pull an "emergency brake" and reimpose social curbs if the infection rate rises above 50 cases per 100,000 residents over a week. That has already happened in at least three districts in recent days, according to the RKI.

#### Football, slaughterhouses

In Germany's most populous state of North Rhine-Westphalia, there has been a spike in cases at a slaughterhouse in the district of Coesfeld, where around 200 of the 1,200 employees have tested positive for the virus. Many of them are foreign workers from eastern Europe who live in shared housing. The regional government has ordered workers at all of the state's slaughterhouses to undergo testing. It has also delayed the loosening of some confinement measures in the district.

An outbreak of COVID-19 at a slaughterhouse in the northern state of Schleswig-Holstein has likewise pushed the district of Steinburg over the infection threshold. In the eastern state of Thuringia, Greiz district has reported a jump in infections among residents and employees of several care homes and a geriatrics hospital. There were also fresh fears for the planned restart of the Bundesliga football season on May 16 after second-tier Dynamo Dresden's players were ordered to go into quarantine over two coronavirus cases.

days of her announcement.

Such a solution will save the country from having to ask the Supreme Court to rule on the validity of the election that had been scheduled for May 10, commission head Sylwester Marciniak told reporters.†The governing conservative Law and Justice (PiS) party had anticipated last week that the top court would rule on the issue and had even assumed it would declare the election null and void.

#### 'Legal absurdity'

"That sounds like an order for the Supreme Court regarding how it should rule," Warsaw-based political scientist Stanislaw Mocek told AFP at the time. "We're in a fog of legal absurdity," he added, echoing the widespread head-scratching and concern around the country.

Many constitutional experts have since expressed doubt as to whether the Supreme Court even has the power to issue such a verdict. Marciniak said that because no votes were cast, 'we have a situation similar to when there is an absence of candidates or only one candidate and no election is held.' Leftist lawmaker Tomasz Trela summed up the Kafkaesque situation on Facebook: 'Today's the day, election day without the election.'

Earlier Sunday, Trela and a fellow leftist politician

commune some 50 kilometers from Tillaberi city, the main town in western Niger and some 100 kilometers from the border with Mali. Last January, Niger authorities restricted motorcycle traffic by day as well as night in a bid to crack down on jihadists operating in the region.

They also closed down a number of food markets they said were "supplying terrorists with fuel and cereals," according to the government. The government recently extended a state of emergency in the region first brought in 2017. According to official statistics, 174 soldiers have been killed in three attacks in the zone since last December at Chingogodar, where 89 were killed on January 8, Inates (71 dead on December 10) and Sanam (14 dead on December 24).

The Islamic State claimed all three attacks. In March,



MARSEILLE: A rainbow is seen early outside the Saint-Charles railway train station in Marseille, yesterday, as the lockdown introduced two months ago to fight the spread of the Covid-19 disease caused by the novel coronavirus starts to ease. —AFP



COLOGNE: Employees of the public order office control the McFIT Studio fitness centre in Cologne, western Germany yesterday as the place reopened at midnight after the lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic. —AFP

As Merkel looks to steer the country cautiously into a new phase allowing more economic activity, some politicians have expressed fears that any precipitous action may spark a second wave of infections. "We are in a critical phase. It is to be feared that after the first deconfinement measures certain people become imprudent," warned Katrin Goering-Eckardt, a senior figure in the Greens, in an interview with financial daily Handelsblatt. "Deconfinement has given the signal that the worst is behind us - but that is not the case," added Karl Lauterbach of Merkel's coalition partners the Social Democrats. —AFP



WARSAW: Warsaw residents crowdily gather on the bank of the Vistula River to enjoy the warm weather, despite the still uncontrolled pandemic of the new coronavirus COVID-19 and the restrictions and recommendations of social distancing. —AFP

had shown up with homemade ballots at a school that normally doubles as a polling station and asked why they were unable to vote. "The polling station is closed, which means someone cancelled the election. But it's unclear who did or on what basis," he told reporters. The anti-government protest movement Citizens of Poland organised an event in the

Malian and Niger soldiers joined forces with French forces in the area for an operation which mobilized around 5,000 troops under the ongoing Operation Barkhane deployment. French general staff credited the counter-terrorism operation with eliminating "a large number of terrorists". The French-led Operation Barkhane is leading counter-terror operations across Sahel states Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger.

UN General Secretary Antonio Guterres warned last week that jihadist groups in the Sahel are exploiting the coronavirus pandemic to step up attacks, according to documents seen by AFP. Guterres urged better coordination among anti-jihadist forces fighting an array of armed groups. —AFP

## News in brief

#### Maltese ambassador resigns

VALLETTA: Malta's ambassador to Finland has resigned after a Facebook post in which he compared German Chancellor Angela Merkel to Adolf Hitler. The Times of Malta reported. '75 years ago we stopped Hitler. Who will stop Angela Merkel? She has fulfilled Hitler's dream! To control Europe,' envoy Michael Zammit Tabona wrote in the post which has since been deleted. The Maltese foreign ministry told him to remove the message and the diplomat, who served as ambassador to Finland since 2014, had resigned, the newspaper said Sunday. Foreign Affairs Minister Evarist Bartolo told the Times of Malta that an apology would be sent to the German embassy. —AFP

#### Nine die in care home fire

MOSCOW: A fire broke out in a retirement home in the Moscow region, killing at least nine people with several more in intensive care in hospital, local authorities said yesterday. The fire in the privately-owned care home in the town of Krasnogorsk started around midnight Sunday to Monday and was extinguished within an hour, emergencies services said. 'Nine people died on site and nine more were rushed to hospital in serious condition and are treated in intensive care,' the Krasnogorsk municipal government said in a statement. Russian agencies said 37 people were in the building at the time of the fire. Kommersant newspaper said many of the care home residents were not mobile and the employees were unable to carry them out from the smoke despite the fire being small. —AFP

#### Tribal clashes in Sudan kill 3

KHARTOUM: Tribal clashes in eastern Sudan left at least three people dead and 79 others wounded, a Sudanese official said on Sunday. The violence broke out on Thursday between members of the Bani Amer and Nuba tribes in the eastern city of Kassala, near Sudan's border with Eritrea. Kassala's governor, Babikr Homd, said in a statement on Sunday that the fighting had escalated by Friday morning, leaving scores wounded and several homes burned. 'By Saturday, three people from the Bani Amer tribe were killed and 79 others were wounded,' he added. Kassala resident Hussein Saleh told AFP that fighting erupted following a dispute between two people from the rival tribes. It was not clear what triggered the dispute. Saleh said the fighting has continued despite police attempts to disperse crowds. The Bani Amer tribe belongs to the Beja people living in eastern Sudan and Eritrea. —AFP

#### Four back-to-back explosions

KABUL: Four back-to-back roadside bombs exploded in a northern district of Afghanistan's capital Kabul yesterday, wounding four civilians including a child, police said. Kabul police spokesman Ferdaws Faramarz said a clearance team was at the site of the attacks. Militants have carried out several roadside bombings and rocket attacks in Kabul and other parts of the country in recent weeks, but Monday's four consecutive explosions appeared to be the first coordinated effort for some months. —AFP

## 20 villagers killed in attacks in Niger

NIAMEY: Bandits riding motorbikes killed 20 villagers in a string of attacks in Niger's western region of Tillaberi, the governor there told AFP on Sunday. An unknown number of "armed bandits" attacked three villages on Sunday at around 5:30 pm local time, said governor Tidjani Ibrahim Katiella.

He said that the assailants "pillaged shops" and looted cereal as well as cattle before heading off towards the north. One local source named villages targeted as Gadabo, Zibane Koira-Zeno and Zibane-Tegui, all administered by Anzourou, a

## International

# Wuhan reports first coronavirus cluster since lifting of lockdown

## All new cases previously classified as asymptomatic

BEIJING: Wuhan, the epicentre of the novel coronavirus outbreak in China, reported yesterday its first cluster of infections since a lockdown on the central Chinese city was lifted a month ago, stoking concerns of a wider resurgence of the disease. The new infections sounded a note of caution amid efforts to ease coronavirus-related restrictions across China as businesses restart and individuals go back to work.



Five new cases reported in Wuhan

Wuhan reported five new confirmed cases, all of whom live in the same residential compound. One of them was the wife of an 89-year-old male patient reported a day earlier in the first confirmed case in the city in more than a month. "At present, the task of epidemic prevention and control in the city is still very heavy," said the Wuhan health authority in a statement. "We must resolutely contain the risk of a rebound."

All of the latest confirmed cases were previously classified as asymptomatic, people who test positive for the virus and are capable of infecting others but do not show clinical signs such as a fever. The number of asymptomatic cases in China is not known, as

they only appear on the radar of health officials when they show up positive during tests conducted as part of contact tracing and health checks. China does not include asymptomatic cases in its overall tally of confirmed cases, currently at 82,918, until they exhibit signs of infection. Mainland China has reported 4,633 deaths.

Hundreds of asymptomatic cases in Wuhan, which was released on April 8 from a months-long lockdown, are currently being monitored, according to the city's health authority. The number of new cases reported in China since April have been small compared with the thousands confirmed each day in February, thanks to a nationwide regime of screening, testing and quarantine. The government said on Friday that China will gradually reopen cinemas, museums and other recreational venues, though restrictions including mandatory reservations and a limit on numbers will be in place.

Shanghai has already reopened some night entertainment venues such as discotheques. Walt Disney Co yesterday reopened its Shanghai Disneyland park to a reduced number of visitors. New outbreaks in China in the past two months have mainly developed in residential compounds or at hospitals. South Korea is also battling a wave of new cases, although there the most recent outbreaks started in nightclubs and bars.

### 'War-time' mode

The Wuhan cases helped push the overall new COVID-19 infections confirmed on May 10 to 17, the highest daily increase since April 28. Northeastern Jilin province, which on Saturday reported a cluster of infections in one of its cities, Shulan, reported three additional local cases. Shulan has been marked a high-

but also the traditional knowledge that is key to promoting inclusiveness, sustainability and resilience, according to urban experts. This is particularly true of large cities such as Delhi and Mumbai, which every day draw thousands of migrants from India's villages looking for better economic opportunities. Faced with a critical shortage of affordable housing in the cities, many settle in slums and other informal settlements, which lack basic amenities such as drinking water and toilets.

In Delhi, urban villages with lower rents compared to flats, and with better amenities than slums, have become the preferred option for students, migrant workers and small businesses that often rent the ground floor of the low-rise buildings. Some, like Hauz Khas and Shahpur Jat, which abut upscale neighbourhoods, have lured designer boutiques and trendy cafes and bars - a reflection of how land use in urban villages has been altered over the years, sometimes illegally, said Kohli.

A scheme to improve civic services in urban villages was launched by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) in 1979, and then transferred to the Municipal Corporation. A committee set up by the federal housing ministry to study integrating lal dora areas into the Delhi Master Plan to 2021, noted in its 2007 report that urban villages had not seen the "desired and expected improvements of urbanization."

It recommended "modern, decent living accommodation" for residents, proper amenities, a liberal land-use policy, and updated property records. Delhi's Master Plan to 2021 noted that redevelopment of urban villages was a critical focus area, but failed to provide a separate legal framework, said Ruchita Gupta, an assistant professor at the School for Planning and Architecture in Delhi. "If we bring urban villages under the same planning model, we will get the same high-density buildings," she said.

"These settlements have their own indigenous character, and a cultural and historical value. Can we work with the existing fabric, and make customized norms with the involvement of the community?" Leenu Sehgal, a planning commissioner at the DDA, said it was drafting new laws for the management of urban villages. "We are re-examining all aspects, from sanitation to building codes, and we will have a framework in the next Master Plan to 2041," she said, without giving further details.

### Dignity and respect

Across India, cities have been slow to meet the needs of people living in informal settlements, with only a few introducing laws to upgrade housing and provide amenities - a task made more urgent by the spread of the coronavirus in slums. Last year, the federal government said it would legalize nearly 2,000 unauthorized colonies in Delhi, upgrading infrastructure and giving more than 4 million poor residents the right to own their homes. In Budhela, a settlement of 350 households and about 4,500 people, there is growing discontent with the narrow lanes that get waterlogged in the rains, the open drains and lack of green spaces. Residents are also frustrated by their inability to use their homes as collateral for bank loans, as most do not have titles. The process of registering for one is too onerous and costly, Tyagi said. "We are asking for just the basics, so we can live with dignity and respect," he said, pointing to piles of trash lying by the road. —Reuters



WUHAN: Senior students attend class at a high school in Wuhan in China's central Hubei province. Senior school students returned to class on May 6 in the central Chinese city of Wuhan, where the coronavirus that has now swept the globe first emerged late last year. — AFP

risk area, the only place in China currently with that designation.

"We're now in a 'war-time' mode," said Jin Hua, mayor of Shulan, which until the weekend had reported no local cases for more than 70 days. Shulan has imposed a lockdown on its 600,000 residents since the weekend, with just one member of a household being allowed out each day to buy necessities. One of the three cases confirmed in the Jilin province on May 10 was from Shulan. The other two were from the city of Jilin uncovered through contact tracing of people

who were in contact with earlier Shulan cases.

Nearby Liaoning and Heilongjiang provinces each reported one case, adding to worries about a resurgence of the outbreak in the region. A 70-year-old patient in Harbin, capital of Heilongjiang, had tested negative seven times before results turned positive. Of the new cases, seven were so-called imported cases in the northern Chinese region of Inner Mongolia involving travelers from overseas. Across China, the number of new asymptomatic COVID-19 cases fell to 12 on May 10 compared with 20 reported a day earlier. — Reuters

## 'No man's land': New Delhi's urban villages face uncertain future

NEW DELHI: Many of the landmarks of Paras Tyagi's life remain the same in Budhela village in Delhi where he grew up: the house he lived in, the school that he, his father and grandfather attended, the homes of neighbors he knew as a child. But the farmland that Tyagi's grandfather once owned is long gone, a pond that the cattle used to drink from has been filled in and walled off, and around the village, high-rise apartment and office blocks and a Metro station have sprung up.

Budhela is one of 135 urban villages in Delhi, settlements that are exempted from building codes and excluded from its plans - leaving nearly a million people, most of whom have no titles to their homes, without a blueprint for the future. "We are among Delhi's oldest residents, yet we are losing what we had, and suffering from pollution, congestion and gentrification," said Tyagi, co-founder of the Centre for Youth Culture Law and Environment (CYCLE), a public policy non-profit.

"Urban villages provide housing options for low-income families and migrant workers, commercial spaces for factory outlets and upscale markets, but they are largely neglected and desperately in need of infrastructure upgrades," he said. Large parts of Delhi were once agricultural. As these were acquired by authorities, some residents stayed on in adjacent areas that came to be known as "lal dora", or red thread in the Hindi language, for the red line that demarcated them. Some lal dora lands were designated as urban villages - small islands in the constantly changing metropolis - growing in number from 20 in 1962, when Delhi's first master plan was made, to 135 today. The city also has scores of rural villages. Lacking property records, the governance structure of their rural counterparts and left off the city's plans, Delhi's urban villages are largely run by influential families, with little oversight by civic authorities, residents and urban experts say. As pressure increases to integrate lal dora lands into the city's master plan, authorities must consider their unique character and history, said Kanchi Kohli, a fellow at the Centre for Policy Research, a think tank in Delhi.

"Lal Dora areas have grown exponentially with risky and inadequate civic infrastructure. These areas need to be a part of Delhi's urban planning, but their inclusion has been and continues to be a complex process," she said. "Any attempt to integrate them into the master plan will need to protect them from land grabs, and be a careful, informed process that looks at class stratification and historical marginalization," she said.

### Historical value

Almost 70% of the world's population will live in urban areas by 2050, according to estimates by the United Nations. In India, as elsewhere, rapid urbanization is putting pressure on governments to build more apartment blocks and metro rail networks, which has led to the razing of old buildings and neighborhoods.

Cities risk losing not just their history and heritage,



ALGIERS: An Algerian man buys vegetables at a market on the outskirts of the capital Algiers, during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. — AFP

## Algerian regime exploits virus to defeat protesters

TUNIS: The Algerian regime is exploiting coronavirus to defeat a protest movement that has shaken it to its core over the past year, analysts say. Despite protesters deciding to suspend their weekly gatherings since the start of the public health crisis, repression of regime opponents has persisted. Security forces have targeted young bloggers, independent journalists, online media and activists from the "Hirak" protest movement.

Rapidly adopted laws ostensibly aimed at preventing the dissemination of false news and hate speech have further stoked fears of an orchestrated campaign to muzzle free expression. The new laws "aim to repress citizens' freedom of expression", said lawyer and activist Abdelouhab Chiter, a lecturer at the University of Bejaia. A law on "spreading false information", he said, "was debated and passed by parliament in a single sitting, in the absence of almost half of its members".

Akram Belkaid, a journalist for the Oran daily, warned of "a return to the iron fist as in the 1970s". "Hirak won the first leg of the game," he said. "The regime is on course to win the second leg, and its true goal is to prevent any further rematches being held at all—or in other words, to prevent protests reoccurring once the pandemic has been overcome."

### Police & judicial harassment

Karima Direche, a historian specializing in contemporary Maghreb region affairs, said the pandemic was "bread from heaven for the regime". "The confinement period lends itself to police and judicial harassment. This explains the dozens of arrests of known and unknown people in all Algeria's cities," she said. The protest movement, calling for the full-scale overhaul of a system in place since independence in 1962, scored one major success: it toppled president Abdelaziz Bouteflika after two decades in power.

Members of the unprecedented, leaderless and diverse movement had vowed to continue their mass demonstrations "until they're all gone!" On Sunday, hundreds of people staged a rare protest despite the virus pandemic near Tizi-Ouzou in the northeastern Kabylie region to denounce the arrest of Hirak activists by the police, according to social media reports. "It is a rally of support for five activists summoned" by the police, opposition MP Mohamed Cherif Fahem who took part in the protest in the rural community of Trizi Gheniff, said on his Facebook page.

"The authorities are taking advantage of the (health) crisis to intimidate people and summon activists in the hope of aborting the Hirak," the lawmaker added. President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, elected in a poll that drew less than 40 percent turnout, has said that "a true democracy (is built on) a strong state with justice and national cohesion". He also cites "national sovereignty" to justify censorship measures against websites he accuses of being in the pay of foreign organizations.—AFP

## For Malaysian schoolgirl, homework is sewing PPE gowns to help beat virus

SEREMBAN: For a nine-year-old Malaysian schoolgirl, the new coronavirus was hard to fathom. But Nur Afia Qistina Zamzuri knew one thing for sure: It was dangerous. So when she heard that a local hospital was looking for people to sew protective gear, she immediately volunteered. "I felt bad, so I told my mom I wanted to help," Nur Afia told Reuters at her home in Kuala Pilah, a town in Malaysia's southwestern Negeri Sembilan state.

Nur Afia, who learned to sew at the age of five, can make four full personal protective equipment (PPE) gowns a day, parking herself at a sewing machine between playtime and attending online classes while schools are closed amid a country-wide lockdown. Malaysia, which until mid-April had the highest number of coronavirus cases in Southeast Asia, has reported more than 6,600 infections, including over 100 deaths. — AFP

## Trafficking, ship wrecks blight Trinidad-bound Venezuelans

GUIRIA: Ana Arias breaks down in tears when she cooks chicken soup. It was her 15-year-old daughter's favorite dish. "They ripped her from my arms," said Arias as she remembers the last message her daughter Luisannys sent her before embarking on a fateful journey to Trinidad and Tobago. It's a journey that many Venezuelans have undertaken in a bid to flee poverty, but it's one that has resulted in dozens disappearing. "Mama, I love you, I miss you a lot," wrote Luisannys on April 23, 2019, hours before disappearing. Sitting in her living room in the town of Cumana, in the northeastern state of Sucre, with an old portrait of the curly-haired and olive-skinned Luisannys dressed in the blue uniform and cap she wore at primary school, Arias told AFP she suspected her daughter was "sold" by human traffickers.

These "mafias," as opposition lawmaker Robert Alcala calls them, make money from illegal immigration, sending desperate people on the roughly 100-kilometer journey from Guiria in Sucre to Trinidad in barely seaworthy boats.

"The women are exploited sexually and the men in rough jobs" on farms or in factories, said Alcala. Arias, currently in isolation due to the coronavirus pandemic, has waited months for investigators to produce something. "No-one answers," she says. A week before that final text message, Luisannys left home with school friends, ostensibly to buy a shirt. Arias never saw her again. The last she heard of her youngest of two daughters is that she boarded a boat that sank.

### 'Desperation'

Hundreds of would-be migrants have disappeared over the last two years making the clandestine journey from Venezuela to Trinidad, Curacao or Aruba. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said this "shows the desperation" of those fleeing Venezuela's economic collapse. The UN says almost five million Venezuelans have left the country since 2015, with 24,000 heading across the sea to Trinidad. Contacted by AFP, authorities on the island nation, which requires visas for Venezuelans, declined to comment. Neighbors saw Luisannys being forced into a car, according to Arias, who two days later received a phone call. It was Luisannys saying her captors were demanding the \$200 they'd paid for her to release her. Arias, a 40-year-old seamstress, broke down in tears.—AFP



NEW DELHI: A homeless man sleeps inside a flowerpot on a roadside in New Delhi. — AFP



# Business

TUESDAY, MAY 12, 2020

**10** With prices going down, jobs leaving, US oil workers learn patience



**11** stc launches Microsoft 365 solutions for customers

Transform the way you work using Microsoft 365 with stc Business

6 Months Free



**11** CB: Crisis costing Swiss economy \$11-17bn a month



OCEAN CITY, MD: View of a closed shop selling beach items on Sunday in Ocean City, Maryland. A popular summer tourist destination, Ocean city reopened the beach but town officials said the initial reopening was designed primarily for locals. — AFP

## US small businesses expect longer impact

### Michigan to reopen manufacturing after coronavirus lockdown

WASHINGTON: Eighty-one percent of small US companies surveyed by Veem, a global payments network, expect the new coronavirus pandemic to affect their business over the next 12-16 months, and nearly 90 percent are bracing for an economic slowdown, the company said yesterday.

San Francisco-based Veem, which helped thousands of small companies apply for loans under the federal government's \$660 billion emergency Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), said small businesses were moving quickly to adapt to the changing climate. Of the 690 firms surveyed, 65 percent said they had either submitted an application for the federal aid or planned to do so in the near future, Veem said in its first report on the sentiment among small to mid-sized businesses.

The Small Business Administration has so far approved more than 2.5 million loans totaling \$536 billion, it said Friday. The US economy - the largest in the world - has been particularly hard hit by widespread shutdowns aimed at containing the spread of COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus. US government data on Friday showed the unemployment rate surging to 14.7 percent last month. The White House said joblessness could hit 20 percent in May.

The crisis was having a mixed impact on small businesses, said Veem chief executive Marwan Forzley, with some companies struggling to survive, while others benefited as their businesses were deemed essential or they switched to working online.

"When you look at the data, there's surprising resiliency with these small and mid-sized businesses. Despite all the uncertainty, they're trying to make changes in their businesses, to ... either benefit from the

situation or repurpose their business so that they're not as badly impacted."

Nearly 70 percent of the companies surveyed cited some uncertainty about the US economy in 2020, and 55 percent said they had already experienced some significant impact to revenue.



SMEs brace for economic slowdown

About 30 percent of the companies were more optimistic, suggesting that some industries were better positioned to thrive in the current environment, Forzley said, citing online retailers and other e-commerce businesses. More than half of the companies reported moderate to high supply-chain disruptions as a result of factory shutdowns, border restrictions and industry-wide furloughs, and more than one third said they were now setting up regional supply chains or rapidly pivoting their supply chain to make needed supplies.

Michigan was due to allow its factories to resume production later yesterday after more than six weeks of a coronavirus lockdown, removing a major obstacle to North American automakers seeking to bring thousands

superjumbos and 155 Boeing-777 airliners. It had suspended flights on March 22 before resuming some services two weeks later.

Emirates Group chief Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al-Maktoum said the airline had performed strongly in the first 11 months of the fiscal year. "However, from mid-February things changed rapidly as the COVID-19 pandemic swept across the world," he said in a statement.

This caused "a sudden and tremendous drop in demand for international air travel as countries closed their borders and imposed stringent travel restrictions." "We expect it will take 18 months at least, before travel demand returns to a semblance of normality," he added. Emirates' profits were boosted by a fall in oil prices, causing a 15 percent decline in fuel costs to \$7.2 billion—around 31 percent of its oper-

of idled employees back to work this month.

Michigan, a major Midwest industrial powerhouse hard hit by both the coronavirus pandemic and its economic fallout, is the latest of several states permitting the restart of assembly lines halted in mandatory business closures meant to contain the outbreak.

But in announcing plans last week to reopen manufacturing, Whitmer, a Democrat, extended a stay-at-home order requiring residents to remain mostly indoors, except for outings like grocery shopping, doctor visits and limited recreation.

Whitmer, seen as a potential running mate for presumed Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden, was an early target of protests around the country organized by supporters of Republican President Donald Trump demanding to end the lockdown. Michigan, a crucial electoral swing state narrowly carried by Trump in 2016, has lost more than 4,550 lives to COVID-19, the respiratory illness caused by the novel coronavirus, ranking fourth among the 50 US states in deaths.

In the nation as a whole, nearly 80,000 Americans have died from COVID-19, out of more than 1.34 million known U.S. infections tallied since Jan. 20, according to figures compiled by Reuters.

Whitmer's reluctance to reopen factories in Michigan also had hampered efforts to restart vehicle assembly elsewhere in the United States because key parts suppliers are based in and around Michigan's automaking hub, Detroit. The clamor for Whitmer to give the go-ahead increased when Republican Governor Mike DeWine in the neighboring state of Ohio, also a key player in the auto industry, announced he was permitting manufacturing to resume there as of last Monday. California fol-

lowed suit on Friday.

The government of Mexico, another important link in North America's automobile production chain, is expected to make an announcement this week regarding its plans for the industry.

The auto sector accounts for 6 percent of US economic output, with more than 835,000 Americans employed in vehicle production. Several weeks of widespread business shutdowns as part of unprecedented social distancing measures have dealt a catastrophic blow to the US economy, casting Americans out of work in numbers unseen since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

The US Labor Department reported the nation's unemployment rate climbed to 14.7 percent last month, up from a record low of 3.5 percent in February, and shattering the previous post-World War Two high of 10.8 percent reached in November 1982. Some 33.5 million US workers have filed first-time claims for jobless benefits over the past seven weeks.

While New York state, the US epicenter of the pandemic, has reported a steady decline in hospitalizations and other key measures of the outbreak in recent weeks, many states - especially in the Midwest - are seeing rising case tallies even as they forge ahead to reopen their economies. Public health experts have warned that moving too quickly to reopen, without vastly expanded diagnostic testing and other precautions firmly in place, risks fueling a resurgence of the virus.

It also remains to be seen how many consumers are willing to venture back into shopping malls and restaurants in the midst of an ongoing pandemic for which there is no vaccine and no cure. — Reuters

### Emirates predicts 18-month lull in air demand

DUBAI: Gulf aviation giant Emirates said Sunday it would take at least 18 months for travel demand to return to "a semblance of normality", despite reporting bumper pre-pandemic profits. The Dubai carrier, the largest in the Middle East, posted 1.1 billion dirhams (\$288 million) in net profit for the financial year ending March, up from \$237 million the previous year. It was the 32nd straight year of profit for Emirates, which operates a fleet of 115 Airbus A-380

superjumbos and 155 Boeing-777 airliners. It had suspended flights on March 22 before resuming some services two weeks later.

Emirates Group chief Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al-Maktoum said the airline had performed strongly in the first 11 months of the fiscal year. "However, from mid-February things changed rapidly as the COVID-19 pandemic swept across the world," he said in a statement.

This caused "a sudden and tremendous drop in demand for international air travel as countries closed their borders and imposed stringent travel restrictions." "We expect it will take 18 months at least, before travel demand returns to a semblance of normality," he added. Emirates' profits were boosted by a fall in oil prices, causing a 15 percent decline in fuel costs to \$7.2 billion—around 31 percent of its oper-

ating costs. However, the carrier saw its annual revenues decline by six percent to \$25 billion due to the coronavirus pandemic and the closure of a runway at Dubai airport.

The airline said it had transported just over 56 million passengers in the fiscal year, a drop of four percent year-on-year, while cargo had declined by a tenth to 2.4 million tons. The strong US dollar eroded \$272 million of profits, while intensive competition also affected the bottom line. Even before the coronavirus pandemic paralyzed the aviation industry, Emirates had slimmed its orders from both Airbus and Boeing, cutting tens of billions of dollars-worth of aircraft. The government of Dubai, whose economy heavily depends on aviation and tourism, said last month it would inject capital into Emirates to help it cope with the impact of coronavirus.—AFP



LONDON: Stewardesses of an Emirates Airlines flight from London arrive at Dubai International Airport amid the coronavirus Covid-19 pandemic. Gulf aviation giant Emirates said Sunday it would take at least 18 months for travel demand to return to "a semblance of normality", despite reporting bumper pre-pandemic profits.—AFP

## Business

# With prices down, jobs leaving, US oil workers learn patience

## Wait for an upturn, or look for work elsewhere? The new dilemma

**CARLSBAD:** Waiting for an upturn, or pick up stakes and look for work elsewhere? What's the dilemma facing oil workers around Carlsbad in New Mexico, where a brutal drop in petroleum prices has hit the local economy hard. Many oil workers in the arid southwestern state have already left the campgrounds where they had parked their RVs, after being drawn here by exceptionally high salaries.

Like Weaver, many of them live in "man camps" just outside the city. In a region where real estate prices have soared after a decade of booming oil prices, they pay \$600 to \$900 a month for a spot to park their camper and pickup truck.

Many of these oil workers—known colloquially as "roughnecks" because of their grueling, physical outdoor work—have lost their jobs in recent weeks. On April 20, the price of a barrel of American crude oil fell so sharply that it even moved briefly below zero, as storage tanks filled up amid the collapse in demand occasioned by the coronavirus pandemic.

This past week, the Permian Basin had fewer than half the active oil rigs it had a year earlier. Sitting on a folding chair outside his camper, Benjamin Loreto says he feels fortunate to still have a job, even if his hours have been scaled back.

The 48-year-old pipeline foreman said his pay has been cut by \$5 an hour and his work week sliced in half, from 80 hours to 40.

"A lot of people, they don't got a job," he said, the raucous sound of Guns N' Roses coming from a nearby speaker. "They (are) right here, but they don't work. They just hanging around, see if something comes up." The region is not the easiest to live in, said Jace Gentry, a 21-year-old refinery worker, who looks forward to getting back to his native Louisiana after being laid off.

"I hate it out here," he said, one knee on the ground as he stroked his pet puppy. "It's sandy and dusty; can't get a breath of fresh air no matter how hard you try." Still, he adds, "you can't beat that money," especially for someone, like him, without a college degree. "People (would) do really anything, they'll live anywhere to get it."

Carlsbad has seen oil prices fall before. People remember how, in 2016, the price of a barrel fell below \$30. In this country of "black gold," these fluctuations are nothing new. But for younger workers experiencing it for the first time, the drop has been jolting.



**CARLSBAD, New Mexico:** Volunteers prepare food packages at Jonah's House Food Pantry fills a bag of food in Carlsbad, New Mexico. Oil industry workers are facing a dilemma faced in recent weeks in Carlsbad, in the southwestern United States, where the sharp drop in oil prices has dealt a blow to the local economy. — AFP

### 'It's our life'

Twenty-year-old Amber, who declined to give her last name, left home last year. She now works in a supermarket and lives in a camper with her boyfriend, an oil-field worker. "The situation we're in kind of gets my anxiety up," she said. Oil is "what we're depending on. It's our life, you know, so if it goes down, we're kind of left stuck."

Many oil-dependent companies here are surviving only thanks to the administration's emergency relief plan for small and medium-sized companies.

With no orders coming in from oil producers, some wells have had to close. "We didn't have anything to work on," said Michael Bassett, operations manager for an oil services company. To keep the company's welders working in the meantime, he said, his boss had

them converting surplus lengths of wire into barbecue grills.

"Until recently, this was a good town to get back on your feet," said Michael Garner, who manages a recreational-vehicle park and previously worked in construction and welding. He's lived most of his life in Carlsbad. Of the 120 sites in his normally full campground, 30 have fallen vacant since oil prices began to drop.

Here in Carlsbad, where unemployment was a scant three percent just two years ago, people know that black gold can turn to lead in a moment. Garner is philosophical about it. "Anyone that's done oilfield very long knows it's up and down; it climbs gradually and it drops like a stone; when it drops, it drops fast."

"You learn to save some money." — AFP



### 'Roughnecks' lose jobs as oil prices fall

In this dusty town in the Permian Basin—site of the planet's largest oil and natural gas deposits, astride the Texas-New Mexico border—a worker can earn \$100,000 or even \$150,000 a year, twice or more than the average private sector wage there.

### Salary cuts

Clenon Weaver, a 34-year-old welder sitting in the shade outside his camper, said he had told his wife back in Texas, "I'm bummed that I'm not going to work, but I'm excited to get to come home and see y'all." Weaver, who is trying to take things in stride—"laughing and cutting up (making jokes) makes everything easier," he said—plans to take a few weeks to enjoy being with his wife, their daughters and new baby girl in their home near Houston, a 10-hour drive away. After that, he plans to start looking for work again. Thousands of people in the Carlsbad region work in the oil business—drilling or operating wells, or building or maintaining pipelines.



**RIYADH:** Saudi Arabian Oil Co pledged an annual dividend of \$75 billion for the first five years to attract investors to its initial public offering in December last year. — AFP

## Saudi Aramco may cut its govt payout

**DUBAI:** Saudi oil giant Aramco may cut its dividend to the Saudi government, but is likely to maintain payouts to minority shareholders as a plunge in crude prices shrinks first-quarter profits, analysts said.

Saudi Arabian Oil Co, as the company is formally known, pledged an annual dividend of \$75 billion for the first five years to attract investors to its initial public offering in December last year.

Since then, global movement restrictions to contain the novel coronavirus have destroyed fuel demand and the oil market has been rocked by the impact of surplus supplies, as Riyadh and Moscow in April pumped flat out in a battle for market share.

When it reports its first-quarter results today analysts expect Aramco to report lower earnings and a decrease in cash flows. Some also predict a cut in payments to the Saudi government, possibly by half.

That would add to the economic burdens on Saudi Arabia from the oil market crash. "We are forecasting a cut of 50 percent in dividends to the government due to the lower oil prices and production," Yusef Hussein, equity analyst at EFG-Hermes, said.

By contrast, the 1.7 percent of shareholders who bought into last year's stock market listing are likely to see their dividend protected as Aramco, in common with other giant oil companies, seeks to retain shareholders made nervous by the twin shocks of the coronavirus crisis and the climate crisis. Aramco paid a dividend of \$73.2 billion in 2019 and has said it plans to declare a cash dividend of \$75 billion in 2020, of which 1.7 percent will go to minority shareholders. Analysts expect the 1.7 percent portion - which amounts to \$1.3 billion - to be untouched.

ExxonMobil, BP and Chevron have maintained their quarterly payouts, but Royal Dutch Shell cut its dividend for the first time since World War II to conserve cash.

### SABIC adds to pressure

Another pressure on Aramco is a deal to buy a 70 percent stake in petrochemicals maker SABIC.

Reuters reported on Sunday the company was seeking to cut the cost of the \$69 billion acquisition, according to two sources. It needs to pay \$25 billion this year to the kingdom's sovereign wealth fund, according to the payment terms. "I expect they will be able to cover most of this with debt financing - as per the original plan - and any balance can easily be covered with cash," Hussein said. Aramco had \$60 billion in cash as of end 2019 and about \$7 billion debt is expected in 2020.

Global benchmark Brent crude dropped some 65 percent in the first three months of the year, before OPEC+ agreed to cut oil supply by a record 9.7 million barrel per day from May 1 to offset the virus impact on demand and shore up prices. Aramco had a negative gearing of minus 0.2 percent at the end of 2019, but given the new realities, Aramco will probably need to borrow this year and could see its gearing - net debt divided by balance sheet capital - climb nearer to the levels of other oil majors, analysts said. They did not give any Aramco debt forecast.

A mean estimate by analysts at Egyptian investment bank EFG-Hermes, Saudi Arabia's Al-Rajhi Capital and Dubai-based Arqam Capital forecast Aramco would report net income of \$17.8 billion for the quarter, compared with \$20 billion in the fourth quarter of last year.

They also expect revenues of \$63.8 billion in the first quarter, compared with \$85 billion in the fourth quarter. "Aramco is now facing the same challenge as any other big oil player, striking the right balance between capex (capital expenditure), dividends and debt load," Dmitry Marichenko, senior director at Fitch Ratings, said. — Reuters

## Oil down in Asia after big gains

**SINGAPORE:** Oil prices were down in Asian trade yesterday after big gains last week on signs of a demand revival as some governments ease coronavirus lockdown measures. US benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) was down 2.95 percent to \$24.01 a barrel in morning trade.

International benchmark Brent was changing hands at \$30.27 a barrel, down 2.26 percent. Both contracts were up Friday, with WTI advancing 25 percent from the previous week following unprecedented output cuts by major crude producers and hopes of demand returning as some key economies began to ease strict measures to contain the virus.

It was the first back-to-back weekly gain for WTI since February. The number of active US oil rigs also continued to fall in a sign of dampened drilling activity.

Analysts said traders were locking in profits on Monday, causing prices to fall.

"Oil prices have eased this morning on light profit-taking flows, helped by data from India suggesting oil demand nearly halved last month," OANDA senior market analyst Jeffrey Halley told AFP. Analysts, however, expect the decline to be limited. "Crude oil prices continue to find support from increasing supply cutbacks amid the improving macro backdrop," ANZ Bank said in a note. — AFP

## Croatian oyster farmers hope better harvest

**MALI STON, Croatia:** Oyster farmers in Croatia are worried this season's harvest will go to waste as the outbreak of the new coronavirus means tourists, the main consumers of the delicacy on the Dalmatian coast, stay away.

Now that the government has begun to partially lift a lockdown imposed in mid-March, some are hoping that the reopening of restaurants will restore at least some of the demand. The oyster farms of Mali Ston, a stunning bay on the southern Adriatic Peljesac peninsula which lies 50 kilometers (31 miles) northwest of Dubrovnik, produce around two million oysters every year. Their industry has taken a severe hit from the pandemic.

"Some 90% of our production of oysters goes to restaurants here and in Dubrovnik area. There is little consumption among the locals. So, we can expect huge losses this year," said Marija Radic, who heads an association of oyster producers in Mali Ston.

Two weeks ago the Croatian government decided to restart the economy in several phases, and restaurants and bars have been allowed to reopen, provided they follow strict hygiene rules. "Up to now there was no possibility to sell them. I would be happy if we managed this season just to cover the (production) costs and keep some financial potential for production next year," said Zdravko Lazic, an oyster farmer from Mali Ston.

Lazic had just returned from visiting his farm out in the bay, which is dotted with buoys and surrounded by low hills. Croatia, where tourism accounts for almost 20% of its annual gross domestic product, is still holding out for some tourists this year. — Reuters

## Indonesia eyes \$1.0bn for carrier Garuda

**JAKARTA:** Indonesia is drawing up a \$1.0 billion rescue plan for struggling national airline Garuda after the coronavirus forced the company to ground most of its planes. Bloomberg News reported yesterday.

Under the plan, some \$500 million in Garuda debt would be restructured with another \$500 million in new loans to help the airline meet operational needs for the next six months, the report said, citing Deputy State-Owned Enterprises Minister Kartika Wirjoatmodjo. The company was facing the prospect of defaulting on Islamic bonds known as sukuk, due next month, the report said, adding that investors would be offered

the option of extending maturities on their investment by three years or a staggered repayment scheme.

"Garuda remains a good company with bright prospects," Wirjoatmodjo was quoted as saying. "Its business will remain robust after the outbreak ends."

Neither the ministry nor the airline responded to AFP's request for comment on the report. State-controlled Garuda—which operates a fleet of more than 200 aircraft with its Citilink subsidiary—has temporarily cut employee salaries to help cope with an air travel slump sparked by the global pandemic.

Coronavirus has dealt a crushing blow to the global aviation industry, which has been directly affected by confinement measures and travel restrictions. Colombia's Avianca, the second-largest airline in Latin America, filed for bankruptcy protection Sunday in a bid to reorganize its debt due to the unprecedented hit to global air travel. — AFP



**JAKARTA:** Indonesia is drawing up a \$1.0 billion rescue plan for struggling national airline Garuda after the coronavirus forced the company to ground most of its planes. — File photo

## Sri Lanka halts trading soon after reopening

**COLOMBO:** Sri Lanka's stock exchange was shut 38 seconds after opening yesterday for the first time following a 52-day virus lockdown, as a plunge in share prices triggered a circuit breaker.

The Colombo Stock Exchange was closed on March 20 when the government imposed a lockdown to combat the spread of the coronavirus, with only essential services allowed to operate. But soon after the restart, prices tumbled 10 percent, leading the exchange to stop trading.

Analysts said the stock market was likely to perform badly when it reopened, with the pandemic devastating key sectors of the economy including tourism, banking and exports. "This should have been expected with foreign investors keen to liquidate their stakes," Pasindu Perera, at Candor Equities, said.

"This crisis is unlike any other, and we may just be at the start of it. So in the short to medium term the selling will persist."

The market's top 20 stocks have tumbled 38 percent since the first virus patient was reported on January 27.

The island nation has reported 863 cases and nine deaths so far. The government eased the lockdown on Monday in a bid to revive the economy, which was already struggling to recover from the deadly Easter Sunday bombings in April last year.

Health authorities have also said the spread of the virus was under control. Offices were allowed to reopen with reduced staffing but schools and food outlets remained closed. Sri Lanka in late March called on international lenders to grant it and other developing nations a debt moratorium and defer repayments as they grapple with the pandemic. The country last week appealed to its 1.5 million government employees to donate their May salary to the government, saying it would help to narrow the budget deficit by saving some 100 billion rupees (\$525 million). — AFP

Business

# stc launches Microsoft 365 solutions to support corporate clients, SMEs

## Companies and SMEs can now enjoy 6 months free subscription

KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, announced the launch of a series of integrated solutions for Microsoft 365, dedicated to its companies and small & medium enterprises customer base, in cooperation with its strategic partner, Futures Communication Company - Microsoft Gold Partner.

In a statement released by stc, the Company highlighted that the initiative led by General Manager of Sales & Account Management at stc, Meshari Al-Hamad, aims to provide an integrated work environment with digital solutions designed to suit the needs of customers and SMEs. stc launched attractive Microsoft 365 packages, which in return will support businesses to continue their operations in a professional and uninterrupted manner. The Company has always been a strong supporter of local businesses and their success, which is the driving force behind designing flexible packages to meet the varying needs of business owners.

These packages include 6 free months for customers upon subscribing to the annual basic package. stc also aims to provide complete support to the business sector, while assisting in the mitigation of current economic conditions due to the global COVID-19 pandemic.



### Initiative to help Kuwait economy

stc mentioned that the Microsoft 365 solutions include an integrated set of cloud computing applications, designed to cater to a wide range of needs, including Email, Microsoft teams - the visual communication program for organizing employee meetings and OneDrive

File Exchange - the cloud storage service. Packages offer by stc are distinguished by their comprehensive support services provided through technical experts, who will assist clients in activating their services instantaneously and hassle-free. This comes in addition to any of stc's services available through distinct and flexible annual packages, according to each customer's needs.

stc concluded by saying that the Microsoft 365 solutions offered to its customers came in collaboration with Future Communications based on a strategic partnership that spans over a year of defined success and excellence. Both entities have worked diligently, side by side, to help develop the Kuwaiti Telecom sector by offering an array of the latest digital solutions, top-notch information, and advanced communications technology. This ongoing collaboration has contributed towards supporting business owners with their projects, while meeting their needs to develop and expand their business operations with ease and at reduced costs.



## Dollar edges up, yen falls amid risk appetite

LONDON: The dollar edged up in early London trading yesterday while the Japanese yen weakened as risk appetite was boosted by more countries making moves to re-open their economies, despite the coronavirus continuing to spread. Japan said yesterday it could end its state of emergency in many regions this week and New Zealand said it could ease restrictions on Thursday. The UK has also set out plans to ease the lockdown while in France shops reopened yesterday.

The safe-haven Japanese yen hit a 10-day low versus the dollar, down more than 0.5 percent since New York's close. Against a basket of comparable currencies, the dollar up around 0.1 percent.

"The ongoing improvement in global investor risk sentiment following acute financial market strains in March reflects in part building investor optimism that the global economy is past the worst point of the COVID-19 crisis," Lee Hardman, currency analyst at MUFG, wrote in a note to clients.

A conciliatory phone call between US and China trade negotiators on Friday also provided a boost to risk appetite, as it staved off fears of an imminent new round of US tariffs, even after US President Donald Trump said he was "very torn" over whether or not to end the preliminary phase one trade deal between the two countries.

The euro was down slightly, having fallen in early London trading, last down around 0.1 percent versus the dollar at \$1.0832. The riskier Australian dollar was up slightly, while the New Zealand dollar was down 0.2 percent, having fallen from around 0400 GMT.

The Norwegian crown hit new monthly highs versus the dollar at 0600 GMT, extending its decline from a late April lowpoint, last up around 0.3 percent. Easing lockdowns is interpreted as positive by traders as it enables economic activity curtailed by the coronavirus to resume. Lifting the lockdowns too early, however, risks triggering another wave of the new coronavirus.

South Korea warned of a second wave of the virus as infections rebounded to a one-month high and new infections have accelerated in Germany. —Reuters



## Eurozone bond yields edge up on exit hopes

LONDON: Borrowing costs across the euro area nudged higher yesterday, reflecting a slightly more upbeat tone in world markets as more countries look to restart their economies after coronavirus lockdowns. Italian bond yields rose after Friday's

## CB: Crisis costing Swiss economy \$11-17bn a month

GENEVA: Switzerland's central bank chief said in an interview published by Swiss media Sunday that the coronavirus crisis was costing the Swiss economy up to \$17 billion each month.

The head of the Swiss National Bank, Thomas Jordan, said the crisis surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic was weighing heavily on the Swiss economy, which was currently functioning at just 70-80 percent of its normal level.

"You have to go back to the oil crisis of the 1970s to find such a collapse of growth," he told the Tamedia group in an interview published by several Swiss papers Sunday. The impact of the widespread measures put in place in the Alpine nation to halt the spread of the virus was running up "enormous" costs, he said, "to the tune of 11-17 billion Swiss francs (\$11.3-\$17.5 billion, 10.4-16.1 billion euros) each month."

Jordan cautioned that the public debt would swell, as would costs linked to unemployment insurance and to the subsidies provided to businesses to keep them afloat, pushing Switzerland towards a significant deficit this year.

The Le Matin Dimanche and SonntagsZeitung weeklies calculated Sunday that Switzerland in all should dish out some 100 billion to mitigate the effects of the crisis. They pointed out that in April joblessness surged 43 percent compared to the same month in 2019 with some two million people, out of a population of 8.5 million, drawing partial unemployment benefits.

Switzerland has stopped short of ordering full confinement, but introduced a range of emergency measures in mid-March, including closing



GENEVA: Switzerland's central bank chief said in an interview published by Swiss media Sunday that the coronavirus crisis was costing the Swiss economy up to \$17 billion each month. —Reuters

## Stocks rise as economies come out of lockdown

SYDNEY/HONG KONG: Asian shares followed Wall Street higher yesterday as investors looked ahead to more countries restarting their economies, even as some reported an unwelcome pick up in new coronavirus cases.

European markets are also heading north, with EUROSTOXX 50 futures and FTSE futures up about 1 percent. E-Mini futures for the S&P 500 opened softer but bounced as the Asia day wore on and was last up 0.5 percent.

Encouraging investors in Asia was further loosening of coronavirus restrictions in the region with New Zealand easing some curbs from Thursday while Japan plans to end a state of emergency for areas where infections have stabilized. In Europe, millions of French people are also set to cautiously emerge from one of that region's strictest lockdowns on Monday.

That comes even as South Korea warned of a second wave of the new

coronavirus as infections rebounded to a one-month high, while new infections accelerated in Germany.

Investors seemed determined to stay optimistic and MSCI's broadest index of Asia-Pacific shares outside Japan firmed 1.1 percent. Japan's Nikkei climbed 1.5 percent to 20,485.00 points in afternoon trade. Earlier in the session, the index rose as much as 1.8 percent to hit its highest since March 6.

Chinese blue chips rose 0.1 percent. Chinese inflation and production data due this week will be closely watched for clues on how the pandemic has hit demand in the world's second-largest economy.

Wall Street had rallied on Friday after the April payrolls report proved dire but not quite as awful as analysts' worst fears. "Just getting the worst jobs report in history out, is at the margins helpful for risky assets," said Alan Ruskin, head of GIO FX at Deutsche Bank.

"Since late March there has been an extraordinary divergence between the real economy and financial risk, with the latter helped by unprecedented policy accommodation," he added. "Markets know the real economy data is awful. We are less sure of how long markets aided by policy, can defy the real econ-

restaurants and most other businesses, to combat the spread of the novel coronavirus.

The wealthy Alpine nation, which has counted more than 1,500 deaths and over 30,000 infections from COVID-19, has gradually begun lifting measures, with restaurants, shops and schools due to open Monday.

Jordan said the loosening of confinement measures was vital, stressing the need to step up economic activity to keep a handle on the

rising debt levels.

"It makes sense that the gradual deconfinement should start now," he said, insisting that Switzerland's essential education, health and retirement systems "rest on the stability of our economy." Jordan said the central bank had been busy intervening in foreign exchange markets to stabilize the value of the Swiss franc which is considered a refuge currency in times of crisis. —AFP



TOKYO: Pedestrians are seen reflected in a quotation board displaying stock prices on the Tokyo Stock Exchange in Tokyo. —AFP

omy, if the growth improvement is slow."

The bond market certainly seems to think any recovery will be slow with two-year yields hitting record lows at 0.105 percent and Fed fund futures turning negative for the first time ever.

The rally in prices has come even as

the US Treasury plans to borrow trillions of dollars in the next few months to plug a gaping budget deficit. Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell is due to give a keynote speech on Wednesday and analysts suspect he will rule out taking rates negative, at least for now. —Reuters

decision by Moody's, to leave its rating on Italy unchanged at one notch above junk territory, as expected.

France was cautiously emerging from its lockdown on Monday and Britain on Sunday outlined plans to begin slowly easing its restrictions. The quicker countries can restart their economies, the greater the chances of a swift rebound from the coronavirus economic shock.

"The focus is on the restarting economies and risk sentiment has a chance to recover further despite the dreadfully weak economic data for April," said Commerzbank rates strategist

Rainer Guntermann.

"With the weekend newsflow not sending any fresh warning signals, the air for Bunds is getting thinner and 10-year bond yields should rise above -0.5 percent." Germany's benchmark 10-year Bund yield was up 1.5 basis points in early trade at -0.52 percent, not far off 1-1/2 month lows hit at the end of April.

Ten-year bond yields in Italy were also 1.5 bps higher, trading at 1.8 percent.

While Moody's left Italy's ratings unchanged on Friday, DBRS Morningstar cut Italy's ratings trend to "negative" from "stable". DBRS blamed

considerable uncertainty over the economic repercussions stemming from the COVID-19 outbreak, adding that Italy's rating outlook remains weak. Mizuho bond strategists said they expected the "fundamental weakness" of the periphery to persist.

"The trajectory towards a sub-IG (investment grade) rating for Italy remains inexorable, and it is only a matter of time before funds begin to move to pre-empt rating downgrades," they said in a note.

A cut to junk territory by one of the three major agencies matters because of its implications for Italy's position in major bond indexes. —Reuters

# New York sounds alarm over coronavirus-linked syndrome

**NEW YORK:** New York's Mayor Bill de Blasio on Sunday voiced 'tremendous concern' over an uptick in cases of a pediatric syndrome that scientists suspect could be linked to COVID-19, which has left at least three people dead statewide. The mayor said 38 cases of pediatric multi-system inflammatory syndrome detected in New York City, with an additional nine suspected cases awaiting confirmation.

Shortly afterward Governor Andrew Cuomo said the state health department was probing 85 potential cases statewide of the syndrome, which exhibits similarities to Kawasaki disease and toxic shock syndrome. One of the deaths was a five-year-old boy. Howard Zucker, the state's health commissioner, said the others included an elementary school-age child and an adolescent. The children were not known to have pre-existing conditions and lived in three different counties, Zucker said.

Cuomo said two additional deaths were under investigation, which if confirmed would bring the total statewide death toll linked to the syndrome to five. Symptoms of the illness include persistent fever, rash, abdominal pain and vomiting, as well as possible inflammation of blood vessels and the heart. 'What it does is, basically, in a child's body triggers an intensive, almost overwhelming

immune system response. And that actually causes harm to the body,' de Blasio said.

The mayor said all children with associated symptoms would now be tested for COVID-19 as well as antibodies. So far, of the confirmed cases in the city, 47 percent had tested positive for coronavirus and 81 percent had antibodies, the mayor said, indicating most had exposure to the fast-spreading virus at some point. Cuomo said it was possible cases had already cropped up previously but had not been linked to the coronavirus because of the absence of respiratory symptoms.

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. 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 has also reported several cases. Though frightening, most recover without serious issues.

#### Nursing home testing

On Sunday both the mayor and the governor also emphasized research into remdesivir drug therapy,

an anti-viral shown to reduce recovery times in COVID-19 patients. US regulators authorized emergency use of the drug against severe infections, with Japan also approving it last week.

De Blasio said initial trials had shown decreased hospital stays from 15 days to 11 for those treated with the drug. He called on the Donald Trump administration to release more doses to New York, saying the city had received 4,000 but sought 39,000 for the month of May. Cuomo, meanwhile, introduced new regulations for nursing homes, which have been particularly hard-hit by coronavirus, saying all staff must now be tested twice a week for infection—or facilities will face losing their licenses.

And as May 15 approaches, the date to which the governor extended statewide confinement measures, Cuomo said some regions in New York would likely be ready to begin a soft loosening of regulations. But relaxing such measures in New York City appeared distant: the city of 8.6 million is still by far the epicenter of the virus in the United States with approximately a quarter of the country's more than 79,000 deaths. The city has reported more than 14,000 coronavirus-linked deaths and over 5,000 more considered likely caused by the infection. — AFP

## To celebrate mothers trapped in quarantine, Sao Paulo gets creative

**SAO PAULO:** On Friday, musician Rodrigo Cunha and his piano zipped down an elevated highway in a gritty section of downtown Sao Paulo, playing tunes written by Brazil's most famous composers, from Tom Jobim to Vinicius de Moraes. Dressed in a dark blue suit, wearing a plastic face shield and riding atop a modified flatbed truck, Cunha is a conspicuous presence on the Minhocao, a highway weaving through graffiti-covered buildings that has become a symbol of the city's urban grit.

But with South America's largest metropolis under quarantine, the surreal has become increasingly normal in recent weeks. This is one of the few ways, Cunha says, he can serenade the region's mothers, many of whom are forced to pass this Mother's Day without their children or grandchildren. 'I'm really moved to be able to share my art so that people feel alright,' said Cunha, a musician at the city's Baccarelli Elizete Costa Orchestra, who is volunteering his time. 'And I feel good being able to collaborate and be part of this story that we're living through.'

Cunha is part of a crew of dozens of Paulistanos, as the city's residents are

known, who have volunteered their time and, in some cases, resources to pay homage to the city's mothers. While the coronavirus crisis is growing in Brazil, leading to a palpable sense of frustration and fear, the crisis has also been an opportunity for Brazil's famously convivial to show their solidarity in unexpected ways. The truck upon which Cunha rides was provided by a local Mercedes-Benz dealer for free. His suit was provided by a city tailor.

Olga Amato, the owner of a large events business in Sao Paulo and the organizer of the initiative, said she was inspired by a similar homage to medical professionals in the Italian town of Varallo, in which musicians played the famed Brazilian tango 'Odeon,' by Ernesto Nazareth. Amato said she managed to gather all the volunteers she needed for the project within a 24-hour time frame. 'I think that if this virus came to teach us something, it was to teach us that we need to lessen our differences,' she said, after a tune from the piano that left hundreds of Paulistanos glued to their windows. 'That empathy and solidarity will stay with us forever.' — Reuters

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**مستشفى دار الشفاء**  
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## Naomi Campbell

shoots ESSENCE  
magazine's cover at home

Naomi Campbell has shot her own cover image for ESSENCE magazine during self-isolation. The 49-year-old supermodel - who is set to celebrate her 50th birthday later this month - snapped a series of shots from her home on her iPhone to grace the cover of the longest-running Black media platform for its 50th anniversary, marking history as the first cover star to shoot her own photos. Sharing a snap of the May/June magazine cover on her Instagram account, she wrote: "It was a very special honor and unusual experience for me to be able to shoot and style my own cover for Essence's 50th Anniversary Issue on my iPhone. "While it was a sad reminder for me of all the people in media and production who are not able to work due to the coronavirus, it also brought me hope and encouragement to know that our people and our infrastructures are resilient. "We are rooted in knowledge

and creativity and continue to take back full control of our narratives. We will come out of this stronger than ever. Happy Anniversary @Essence magazine. As we both turn the century together." Naomi donned a vintage Chloé dress from her own closet on the cover, which she styled herself - along with her hair, makeup and the rest of her shoot. It marks the model's seventh appearance on the cover of the publication - which is aimed at a readership of African-American women - and, despite turning 50 on May 22, she has no intention of stopping working as a model until "God wants me to". She told the magazine: "I'm embracing being here, living, breathing. All the simple things we took for granted now matter so much more than ever before ... I do believe that I will rest when God wants me to. But until then, I'll keep going."



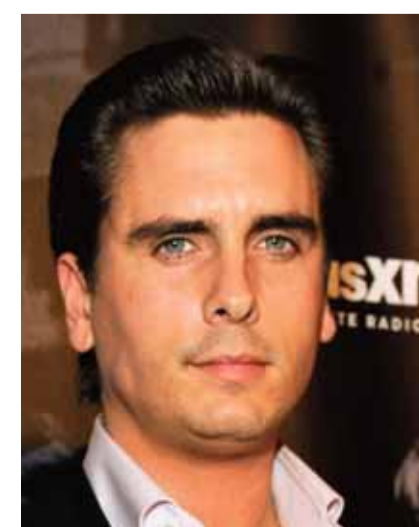
## LAURA HARRIER:

Turning 30 changed  
my beauty regime

Laura Harrier changed her beauty regime when she turned 30. The 'Spider-man: Homecoming' star made the decision to switch up her beauty routine after hitting the milestone birthday in a bid to stay looking youthful after previously strictly sticking to a combination of "clean" products. During an Instagram Live with The Cut, she said: "I am into clean beauty, but I can't say that I only do clean beauty. I'm selectively clean. Turning 30 I was like, 'I do need to be doing more than just putting honey on my face,' honestly." Previously, Laura had been using manuka honey to help reduce and ease any breakouts she's prone to get from hormone changes in her body, but she has since swapped the natural sweet substance for a tougher cleanser. She explained: "That's what I did for a while and it worked! Manuka honey makes a really awesome mask. It's antibacterial, so if I'm breaking out I'll put on a Manuka honey face mask and get in the bath. It drips everywhere - you don't want to do that when you're sitting on the couch. I really love the Dr. Dennis Gross Alpha Beta peel pads. I get hormonal breakouts, and it smooths everything over. But I use the sensitive-skin ones, because the other ones are really intense. I'll alternate that and Shawnee's retinol every other night." What's more, the 'BlacKkKlansman' actress is constantly stopped by people asking what perfume she wears but she actually gives herself a spritz with orange blossom oil from Morocco. She added: "A good friend of mine went to Morocco and brought back this orange blossom oil that's the best-smelling thing ever. I just use that. I had some a few years ago that she gave me and it was in a tiny bottle that I used all up. "People would chase me down the street asking what I was wearing. When she went back she got me a big one. Hopefully I'm stocked up for a little bit."

50 CENT says writing  
his self-help book has  
been 'therapeutic'

50 Cent found writing his own self-help book to be a "therapeutic" experience. The 44-year-old rap star has admitted to enjoying the process of penning his self-help book, saying it's helped him to assess what he was feeling during some of his own life-shaping experiences. Speaking to Ebro Darden on Apple Music, 50 - whose real name is Curtis Jackson - explained: "It was therapeutic at points just going back. "A lot of times when you're in a different space where you can actually assess what you were feeling and going through, you're able to put it in terms where other people can understand it better." 50 is also in the process of creating a posthumous album for the late rapper Pop Smoke, who was shot dead during a home invasion in February. The chart-topping rapper insisted it's not been difficult to put the record together. He shared: "I definitely want to get Roddy Rich and a few of the people that I know that would fit on these records organically involved in it. "I'm going it to send to them and I'm going to say, 'Play it. Listen, if you don't just feel like this is it, don't even touch it. Please send it back. Delete, and just move on.' Because he had so many pieces set up that were so good that it's not tough to put it together." Meanwhile, 50 recently confessed his lyrics are misogynistic. The '21 Questions' hitmaker conceded that his music is prejudiced against women - but he also thinks that, like any artist, he should be free to express himself. He explained: "They are misogynistic, but the world is not under the same circumstances. "Are you going to tell a painter what to paint? I'm an artist. Why am I limited to what you feel should be said?"

Kilmer had cancer  
treatment for his kids

Val Kilmer agreed to cancer treatment for his kids. The 60-year-old actor has children Jack, 24, and Mercedes, 28, from his marriage to ex-wife Joanne Whalley and when Val was diagnosed with throat cancer, he originally planned to pray with his Christian Science practitioner so his body would no longer "manifest outwardly what can be diagnosed as a malady". However, Val's children are not

there's a suggestion that this is a fact". He added: "I just didn't want to experience their fear, which was profound. I would've had to go away, and I just didn't want to be without them." Val previously denied having cancer and explained: "[People] said I was denying that I had cancer, and when they asked me, I didn't have cancer. It was a bit like do you have a broken bone? And if you broke it in high school, you would say no. Suddenly suspect. I have had a bone broken, but why are you being so aggressive? I had a bone broken. It was broken in my leg. 'Oh, so you have a broken leg.' 'No, no, I don't,' I say. I did have a broken leg. "There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so. I prayed, and that was my form of treatment." Val currently uses a tracheostomy tube and believes that prayer was the true treatment for his illness, while the medical intervention is what has hurt him. He explained: "That's from radiation and chemotherapy. It's not from cancer. That 'treatment' caused my suffering." And thanks to his Christian Science faith, Val has no fear of death. He explained: "Someone comes up to you and says you have only four months to live, and the concept of time is a human one. So, if you describe the divine concept of time, there is no time."



Christian Scientists and they convinced him to also have medical treatment for his condition. He told the New York Times newspaper: "[I had the ] suggestion of throat cancer." [In Christian Science], "the idea is rather than say I have it or possess it, there is a claim,



## Riverdale's Lili Reinhart

## to voice Simpsons character

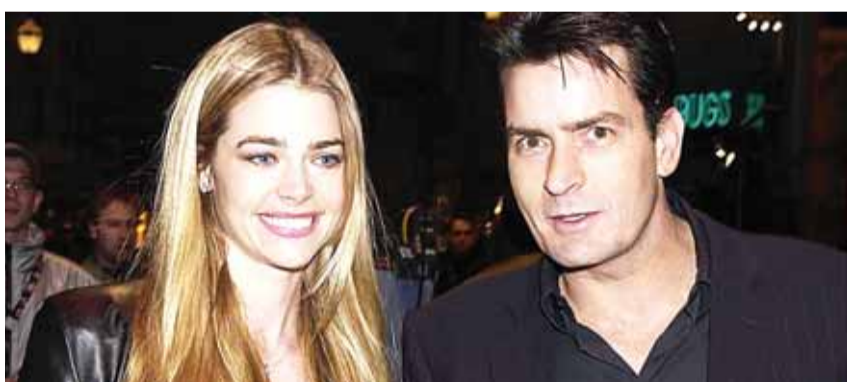
Lili Reinhart is set to voice a character in 'The Simpsons'. The 23-year-old actress has revealed via Instagram that she'll be voicing the part of an eight-year-old girl in an upcoming episode of the iconic cartoon show, called 'The Hateful Eight-Year-Olds'. She wrote on the photo-sharing platform: "It is truly an incredible, surreal blessing that I was able partake in one of the most iconic television shows ever made. If you're interested in hearing me voice a bitchy eight year old, watch @thesimpsons May 10th at 8pm on FOX. (sic)" Lili will be joined in the episode by her 'Riverdale' co-stars Camila Mendes and Madelaine Petsch, both of whom have also landed voice parts in the comedy. Camila, 25, wrote on her own Instagram account: "never in my life did i think i'd get to voice a character on the simpsons but here we are! it's me, @lilireinhart and @madelaine playing mean and annoying 8 yr old girls. airs

may 10th at 8 PM on fox (sic)". Meanwhile, 'Riverdale' closed down production in March due to the coronavirus pandemic. The drama series - which was being filmed in Vancouver, Canada - halted work on its fourth season after an unnamed "team member" came into contact with someone suffering from the virus. A statement from Warner Bros. Television said at the time: "We have been made aware that a team member from 'Riverdale', which is produced in Vancouver, was recently in contact with a person who has tested positive for COVID-19. "The team member is currently receiving medical evaluation. "We are working closely with the appropriate authorities and health agencies in Vancouver to identify and contact all individuals who may have come into direct contact with our team member. The health and safety of our employees, casts and crews is always our top priority."

Disick 'is looking into the  
next steps of his recovery'

Scott Disick is "looking into his next steps" after leaving rehab. The 36-year-old reality TV star recently checked himself into a rehab facility in Colorado - where he sought treatment to help him deal with the pain caused by the death of his parents - and he's now turned his attention to the next stage of his recovery. An insider said: "He's looking into his next steps. "He's talking to a lot of people who can give him psychological, emotional, physical and spiritual health. He knows he needs all four." Scott - who has Mason, 10, Penelope, seven, and Reign, five, with ex-girlfriend Kourtney Kardashian - is not currently in the "dire straits he was in a couple of years back". However, he is still said to be in need of help. The source told People magazine: "He needs a lot of healing. "He's in a lot of pain, and he's drifting right now. He wants to be the man and the father he was created to be, but he's falling very short right now. So he's been taking care of that. He needed help." Initially, it was speculated that Scott - who lost his mother in 2013 and his dad in early 2014 - checked into rehab due to cocaine and alcohol abuse problems. However, Marty Singer, Scott's attorney, subsequently clarified that the

move was instead linked to the death of his parents, Bonnie and Jeffrey Disick. He recently explained: "In an effort to finally come to terms and deal with the pain that Scott has been silently suffering for many years due to the sudden death of his mother, followed by the death of his father three months later, Scott made the decision to check himself into a rehab facility last week to work on his past traumas. "He did not check in for any alcohol or cocaine abuse."—Bang showbiz

Denise has 'great  
communication' with Charlie

Denise Richards has "great" communication with her ex-husband Charlie Sheen. The 49-year-old actress - who was married to the Hollywood star from 2002 until 2006 - has revealed she and Charlie have tried to establish a good relationship in recent times for the sake of their two daughters. Denise - who has Sam, 16, and Lola, 14, with the actor - said: "Communication's great with him. [My husband] Aaron [Phypers] and I actually saw him the other day." Denise also revealed that Charlie, 54, doesn't watch her on 'The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills' - even though their custody battle has previously been discussed on the TV show. She told Us Weekly: "I don't even think he knows [what's airing], but he knows obviously when you file something in court that it's public. "He and I have dealt with this stuff for, gosh, 14,

15 years." The high-profile duo have had their fair share of acrimony since their split. But according to Denise, they now have a good relationship with each other. The actress - who also has an adopted daughter called Eloise - shared: "We try to keep [the show] separate from things, but he hasn't even said anything other than very positive [feedback]. It's all good." By contrast, Denise previously alleged that Charlie - who revealed he was HIV positive back in 2017 - hadn't paid "child support in over a year". The TV star admitted she'd considered taking him to court over the allegation, but ultimately, she decided against going down a "toxic road" with her ex-husband. Denise explained: "He's very lucky because I never took him to court. It is such a toxic road. It brings up so much, like, anxiety."

Lifestyle | Features



A woman wearing a face mask takes a selfie while visiting the Disneyland amusement park in Shanghai yesterday.—AFP photos



Musicians are seen during the reopening of the Disneyland amusement park in Shanghai.



People visit the Disneyland amusement park in Shanghai.

# SHANGHAI DISNEYLAND REOPENS AFTER THREE-MONTH CORONAVIRUS CLOSURE

Shanghai Disneyland reopened yesterday following a more than three-month coronavirus shutdown as China moves nearer to normality and Walt Disney Co. seeks to plug the flow of red ink caused by the pandemic. The theme park in China's most populous city is the first of the entertainment conglomerate's six main Disney resorts around the world to reopen, but does so under the shadow of the coronavirus. It welcomed a capped number of visitors who had to pre-book tickets, have their temperatures checked on arrival and show a government QR code designed to prove they are not a health risk.

On a warm and hazy morning, speakers on a recorded loop asked people to wear masks at all times and reminded them to obey social distancing, including in queues and on rides. Staff held signs instructing "please maintain a proper social distance from other guests" and yellow lines and posters on the ground showed people where to stand when waiting. Disney said there would be increased frequency of sanitisation and disinfection, and the park will limit or suspend performances that often include interaction between visitors and characters such as Mickey Mouse.

Despite the measures and persistent fear of new infections, tickets for the first day sold out within minutes after going on sale Friday, Chinese state media said. "Though many areas are still closed we are very much looking forward to the first day of reopening and wondering what's the difference inside today compared to before," said a woman who gave the English name "Kitty" and was with her excited five-year-old daughter. "We have stayed at home for around two months and got bored enough." Andrew Bolstein, senior vice president of operations at the resort, said the "vast majority" of attractions and facilities were open and they will be "adding more and more as time goes on".



A woman wearing a face mask visits the Disneyland amusement park in Shanghai yesterday.—AFP



Performers dressed as Disney characters are seen during the reopening of the Disneyland amusement park in Shanghai.

### 'Encouraging signs'

Coronavirus emerged in the central city of Wuhan in December and later spread globally, forcing countries around the world to take restrictive prevention measures that have rocked the global economy. But as the first virus-affected country, China also has a head start on returning to normal as the number of reported cases in the country has plummeted. Business activity began resuming in March and last month major tourist sites around the country were reopened and middle and high schools started resuming classes.

Walt Disney Co. said last week that profit plunged

91 percent to \$475 million in the first three months of the year and that it would suffer a \$1.4 billion hit from the coronavirus in the current quarter. The pandemic has dealt a massive blow to the company's theme parks and other operations. Revenue at its "Parks, Experiences and Products" division fell 10 percent to \$5.5 billion in the first three months of the year and the segment's operating income fell 58 percent, the company said.

Disney shuttered the Shanghai park in late January, followed by others in the United States, France, Japan and Hong Kong. Disney CEO Bob Chapek said last week that "we are seeing encouraging signs of a grad-

ual return to some semblance of normalcy in China". Disney has, meanwhile, delayed the release of more than a dozen major films as cinemas have closed. Revenues from new streaming platform Disney+ have helped limit the damage, however, as home confinement has effectively provided an enormous captive audience. Shanghai Disney reopened its shopping and entertainment Disneytown zone in March, plus a park and hotel in the same complex, but kept the main amusement park closed until now.—AFP



A discarded face mask is pictured on the ground in Regents Street in London on May 3, 2020, during the nationwide lockdown due to the novel coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic.—AFP

## Face masks and slippers: Museums preserve lockdown life

Would you put your slippers on display? The global coronavirus pandemic is still raging but museums are already gathering testimony and objects to remember life under lockdown. "It's such an extraordinary experience," Beatrice Behlen, senior curator at the Museum of London, told AFP. "When we knew there was going to be a lockdown, we started straight away talking about what we needed to collect something for the future." The museum, dedicated to the history of the British capital, launched an appeal for Londoners to donate items that reflect their lives during the COVID-19 outbreak.

"It could be something that gives you comfort — one example mentioned often is maybe your favorite slippers, and you've been wearing them every day," she said. It might also be evidence of a new skill someone has picked up, whether knitting or cooking or making masks for healthcare workers. Among the items collected so far are a pot of homemade jam and a makeshift rattle used to accompany the weekly "clap for carers" across the country. "What is interesting for us is the story that's behind it, not necessarily the thing itself," Behlen said. "It needs to mean something to the people. And we asked them to tell us about the object as well."

### 'Collection of emotions'

Harder to curate are the emotions people feel while isolated at home, the feelings of loss and fear, but also safety, hope and love. In response to an appeal by the Museum of Home, also in London, one family has recorded how they set up a screen in front of their table so they could share a meal with relatives via videolink. Another transformed their living room into a workshop to make gowns for healthcare staff. The museum is also asking people to record how they feel about their homes, which are now used as offices, classrooms and gyms. "What seems to be coming out time and again with some of the testimonies is people's resilience to the situation and how they're changing and adapting," said museum director Sonia Solicari.—AFP

## HOW MASKS WENT FROM 'MUZZLE' TO FASHION'S OBJECT OF DESIRE

Once upon a time if you wanted to get ahead you got a hat. Now if you want step outside your front door you need a mask. In a matter of weeks, the coronavirus has upended the Western wardrobe and challenged its deepest codes about freedom, comfort and self-expression. From being a curious oddity seen only on Asian tourists, masks have suddenly become as essential as socks — a signal of civic virtue and a passport to many public spaces denied to the bare faced. "When you wear one you are saying, 'I'm not a threat'," said French designer Stephanie Couder, who made her name with Paris haute couture. "It's a civic gesture."

Yet when she sat down to design a mask, one thought kept coming back to her. "It's a muzzle. It is hard to get away from that," Couder told AFP. Fashion's Mr Zeitgeist, Louis Vuitton's Virgil Abloh had no such reservations, rushing out a simple black mask emblazoned with the arrow logo of his own Off-White label for \$92 (87 euros) a pop. It immediately sold out and has since become the most coveted style accessory in the world, according to trends monitor the Lyst Index, with some now selling secondhand for four and five times that. By contrast, Couder is selling her couture masks for eight euros. "It a social choice for me," she said. "I think we are all asking ourselves how we can be useful." Not surprisingly, she is working flat out to keep up with demand. Indeed Lyst said internet searches for masks have gone up five times since the beginning of the year.

### Early adopters

Even before the virus raised its ugly head, masks were coming in from the fashion cold. American designer Rick Owens was ahead of the curve, masking many of the models in his Paris spring summer collection two years ago and giving out masks to everyone at the show. Back then Owens had pollution and climate change in mind. Yet he was reluctant to revive the idea even as the virus casts its shadow on the last Paris fashion week in March. "I would hate to capitalize on it," he said. "I'm sure people will and it will be sensational on Instagram."

Owens was not alone in seeing a fashion future for masks. Rising French designer Marine Serre was an early adopter and they have also featured in recent Gucci, Vetements and Japanese designer Takahiro Niyashita's The Soloist shows. But many of the big houses remain cautious and deeply ambivalent about whether masks will be part of our fashion future. Style historian Olivier Saillard warned masks were "an accessory we all want to be quickly rid of".

### 'Rather vulgar'

It could be seen as "rather vulgar" to make money from putting a logo on a mask," he told AFP. While Dior, Saint Laurent and Balenciaga have been making free masks for French medical staff and care workers, there is a reticence about going any further. Chloe, a bag and accessory designer for a fabled French house, told AFP from the window of her Paris apartment that she had been asked to toy with some ideas around masks. "It's tricky," she said. "But we could be wearing them for many months or even years, so why not make them into a fetish object. It is what we humans do." Couder said that it we had to live with them, it was best to make masks that were clever, comfortable and calming.



An employee of the company "Jimmy", which manufactures Charro and regional suits, shows a face mask with a Mexican print in Guadalajara, Mexico, amid the new coronavirus pandemic.—bioreports

### AIDS analogy

"I dropped the idea of making ones with a seam down the middle because you can look like a warrior in them. We don't need to make people any more nervous now," said the couturier. For the anthropologist Frederic Keck, masks have long been regarded in the West as "archaic and oppressive", a prejudice that will be hard to shake. Indeed, covering the face is technically illegal in France under a controversial "burqa ban" aimed at Islamic face coverings.

In a think piece in the French daily Le Monde, Keck compared masks and the constraints COVID-19 has imposed on social interaction to the "loss of innocence that AIDS brought to love making" in the 1980s. Despite all the downsides, historian Saillard sees one positive to be drawn from having to wear masks. "In an era which is all about ego... a little bit of self-effacement is maybe not all bad," he said.—AFP

## Coronavirus interrupts world's longest-running cartoon

Production of the world's longest-running cartoon and a mainstay of the Japanese weekend has been interrupted by the coronavirus, forcing the broadcast of re-runs for the first time in decades. "Sazae-san", which first aired in 1969, revolves around the life of Mrs Sazae, a cheerful but klutzy full-time housewife who lives with her parents, husband, son, brother and sister. The 30-minute episodes aired Sunday nights are very popular, and for many in Japan have come to denote the end of the weekend.

But the cartoon, recognized as the longest-running animated TV series by Guinness World Records, has been hampered by the outbreak of the virus, with animation dubbing halted to keep staff safe, broadcaster Fuji Television Network said. "We will halt broadcast of new episodes of 'Sazae-san' for the time being from May 17 and instead air re-runs," it announced on Sunday. The network said upcoming broadcasts would be episodes from two years ago, adding it would announce a date for the resumption of new episodes as soon as possible. It is the first time the network has been forced to air re-runs since 1975, when the economic effects of an earlier oil crisis lingered. Japan has seen a comparatively small coronavirus outbreak with nearly 15,800 infections and 621 deaths. The country is under a state of emergency that was extended last week until the end of May, though the government is considering lifting the measures early in parts of the country.—AFP



This handout received yesterday from the Hasagawa Michiko Art Museum in Tokyo shows an image from the "Sazae-san" TV cartoon series, with the character Sazae-san (second left) and her family in front of their house.—AFP

# Makhlouf: 'Cumbersome cousin' falls from grace

**BEIRUT:** Syria's top tycoon publicly airing his grievances has revealed a power struggle within the ruling family as it tries to cement its power after nine years of war, analysts say. After years of staying out of the limelight, business magnate Rami Makhlouf this month in two videos on Facebook laid bare his struggles with the regime headed by his first cousin President Bashar Al-Assad, in what analysts say is a desperate last stand.

"He can feel the pressure accumulating to marginalize him," said Jihad Yazigi, editor of the economic publication The Syria Report. "He long tried to resist before throwing down his last card and exposing family dissensions," he said. "But it will cost him dearly."

The 51-year-old Makhlouf, who is under both US and EU sanctions, has been considered to be a pillar of Assad's regime ever since the president took over from his father in 2000. He presided over an empire of businesses including as head of Syria's largest mobile operator Syriatel. But trouble has been brewing since last summer, when the authorities seized control of his charity, Al-Bustan, and dissolved militias affiliated to him.

When the finance ministry in December froze the assets of several businessmen over tax evasion and illicit enrichment, the Syrian press said Makhlouf, his wife and companies were included. Assad in October said he had "called on everyone in the private sector who has squandered state funds to return the money" in a bid to shore up state finances.

## 'Too tall'

Syria expert Fabrice Balanche said such anti-corruption drives were often more political in nature. "Anti-graft campaigns in Syria are recurrent because they are ineffective. The aim is just to chop down the trees that have grown too tall," he said. Makhlouf's business empire, which Yazigi



**DAMASCUS:** A man watches the Facebook video of Syrian businessman Rami Makhlouf on his mobile yesterday. — AFP

estimated to be worth "billions of dollars", over the years grew to include stakes in telecommunications, electricity and real estate. "There were many sectors in which no one could work without going via him," he added.

Balanche said he continued to prosper during the war, importing agricultural products and hydrocarbons. "Through shell companies, he was one of the only ones able to skirt sanctions and bring boats of goods into Syria," he said. Makhlouf kept a low profile throughout the war, giving a rare three-hour-long interview to the

New York Times in May 2011, months into anti-government protests. "Nobody can guarantee what will happen after, God forbid, anything happens to the regime," he said.

Protesters had singled him out with slogans such as "Out, out, out, Makhlouf get out" or "We want to talk openly, we've been robbed by Makhlouf's family". In his surprise comeback on May 1, Makhlouf urged Assad to order a "rescheduling" of up to \$185 million in tax payments from Syriatel. In a second video on May 3, he accused security services of detaining employ-

ees to intimidate him into stepping away from his businesses.

"Would anyone ever have thought that the security agencies would come for Rami Makhlouf's companies, while he has been their biggest... sponsor throughout the war?" he asked. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitor said dozens of his employees had been detained.

## 'Cumbersome cousin'

An Arab diplomatic source in Beirut said the Syrian government had managed to extract money "from a number of businessmen". "But it appears Makhlouf refused to pay what he was asked for amid reports that he even tried to get money out of the country," the source told AFP. He said the main causes for his downfall appeared to be the growth of his empire, and the state's "urgent need for cash because of the economic crisis".

The Syrian pound has plummeted to record lows on the black market, and food prices have doubled over the past year. Some reports have pointed to pressure from regime ally Russia, which could be seeking payments from Damascus for its military intervention to shore up Assad. Other reports say the president's wife Asma could have played a role in the row involving Makhlouf.

Yazigi said she might be trying to secure her son's future, but said there was not enough evidence to show this. The affair is reminiscent of an earlier family feud, when almost four decades ago Assad's father banished his brother after he mounted a failed coup against him. "Bashar is getting rid of a cumbersome cousin just like his father got rid of Rifaat Al-Assad in the 1980s," Balanche said. In Makhlouf's case, "Assad will be happy enough just clipping his wings because he's still his cousin". But "in this type of autocratic regime, it's good to remind people from time to time that no one is immune". — AFP

## Italian rice puts pasta in the...

Continued from Page 1

Even so, Europe is a mere lightweight when it comes to global production. It has just 0.4 percent of the total world output of 500 million tons a year, 90 percent of that Asia-based.

With the wind in its sails internationally, Italian rice is also making good headway at home. Consumption soared 47 percent during the first six weeks of the coronavirus pandemic - sometimes outstripping demand even for pasta in that period, according to Coldiretti. "During the COVID-19 emergency, people rediscovered rice and also risotto, which has always been a bit snubbed in Italian cuisine," Stefania Buffa, a 27-year-old rice farmer from

Robbio in Lombardy, told AFP.

Sergio Lombardi, 63, who owns a farm in the same area, explains that "the region can count on water reserves and a constant supply throughout the duration of rice cultivation, which is not possible in many regions of Italy." Sown in spring, Italian rice is harvested between September and October. Rice was introduced into the country's north in the 12th century by Cistercian monks, who took upon themselves the task of improving what was then unsanitary and wooded terrain prone to malaria outbreaks. The rice crop benefited from the arrival of canals, whose layout Leonardo da Vinci designed.

Mechanization then brought further crop advances. Up until the 1950s and 1960s, people came from the south of Italy, particularly women, dubbed "mondine" or seasonal pruners, to cultivate the Po plain. Their harsh working conditions inspired the famous protest song "Bella ciao" as well as neo-realist films including "Bitter Rice" (Riso Amaro, 1949) notably featuring Silvana Mangano and Vittorio Gassman. — AFP

expected Riyadh could lose half of its oil income, which contributes about 70 percent of public revenues, as crude prices have fallen two-thirds since the start of the year. He said the world's leading crude exporter would borrow close to \$60 billion this year to plug the budget deficit. The austerity measures are likely to increase criticism of the government's multi-billion dollar push to host entertainment and sporting extravaganzas as part of economic diversification plans. Also under the spotlight is a proposed \$300 million (\$372 million) Saudi-backed takeover of Newcastle United.

"Saudi citizens are starting to feel the economic impact of the virus in a concrete way," said Middle East expert Yasmine Farouk from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "With hardship will come more scrutiny of state spending elsewhere including the purchase of a football team and millions spent on entertainment events."

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's other ambitious plans to wean the economy away from oil remain vulnerable to austerity measures. But it remains unclear whether the prince's dream project NEOM - a \$500 billion megacity set to be built from scratch along the kingdom's picturesque western coast - will be impacted.

The plans hit a new roadblock last month when a member of the local Huwaitat tribe was killed in a shootout with state forces, after he refused to give up his land for the project. Campaigners said many other members of the Bedouin tribe were detained for spreading anti-displacement slogans and refusing to sign relocation documents, in a rare domestic clash with the government.

"The reforms are positive from a fiscal side as greater adjustment is essential. However, the tripling of VAT is unlikely to help that much in 2020 revenue wise with the expected fall in consumption," said Monica Malik, chief economist at Abu Dhabi Commercial Bank. She said she kept unchanged her deficit forecast of 16.3 percent of GDP for this year, which already factors in a greater than previously announced spending cut.

"Tripling the VAT will test the limits of the balance between revenues and consumption as the economy dives into a deep recession. The move will impact consumption and could also lower the expected revenues," said John Sfakianakis, a Gulf expert at the University of Cambridge. — Agencies

ernment contracts during the coronavirus crisis, in addition to the financial position of the state, Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem said. He said the government had requested that the session be delayed until after the month of Ramadan, but the Assembly office decided to hold the session.

The speaker said the session will not obstruct the work of the medical teams on the frontline, adding that the government should come prepared to answer some questions. He said the Audit Bureau will also make a presentation during the session about supervisory measures taken during the crisis. A group of MPs meanwhile demanded that the Audit Bureau be asked to prepare a comprehensive report on the contracts signed by the government during the coronavirus crisis, saying the government has signed contracts estimated at KD 650 million and these must be explained.

## Europe begins reopening; Asia...

Continued from Page 1

would be "madness" to squander the nation's progress by moving too early.

Almost seven weeks after a nationwide stay-at-home order was put in place, more than 31,800 have died in Britain - a figure second only to the United States. Elsewhere in Europe, however, officials have been emboldened by declining death rates, with France's toll dropping to 70 on Sunday - its lowest since early April - and Spain's daily fatalities falling below 200.

The French were able to walk outside without filling in a permit for the first time in nearly eight weeks yesterday, while teachers began returning to primary schools and some shops were set to reopen, causing a surge in the numbers using the Paris metro. "If it's like this at 6:00 am, imagine how it's going to be in two hours - this is going to be impossible," said one rider named Brigitte early yesterday morning on a crowded train.

Many Spaniards, meanwhile, made plans to meet friends and family at outdoor bars and restaurants, although virus hotspots such as Madrid and Barcelona remain under wraps. Germany too has set in motion the re-opening of shops, eateries, schools and gyms, but the process was thrown in doubt Sunday by official data indicating the virus appears to be picking up speed again.

Chancellor Angela Merkel only days ago declared the country could gradually return to normal, but the figures showed the reproduction rate of the virus had exceeded the critical figure of 1.0, meaning one person infects on average more than one other. As recently as Wednesday, the number had stood at 0.65.

With governments across the world trying to avoid a second wave, Asian nations that were among the first engulfed by the virus but have since brought it to heel are being keenly watched. Much of China has begun to get back to a form of normality, and yesterday Shanghai Disneyland threw open its gates following a three-month shutdown. "We are very much looking forward to the first day of

re-opening and wondering what's the difference inside today compared to before," said one eager visitor named Kitty.

But enthusiasm in China was tempered by news on Sunday that one person had tested positive for the virus in Wuhan. There were five more cases yesterday. Local health officials said the new infections were all from the same residential compound in the city and were mostly older people. South Korean officials ordered nightclubs and bars closed after a fresh burst of transmission linked to an entertainment district in the capital.

At first it was thought to have been triggered by a 29-year-old man who tested positive after spending an evening at five clubs and bars in the Itaewon in early May. But officials said there appeared to be multiple origins for the cluster, with Prime Minister Chung Sye-kyun adding they are struggling to trace "thousands of people" who visited the area. Cautious re-opening nevertheless continues around Asia, with one of the world's largest train networks set to gradually restart operations from today as India eases its lockdown despite the nation reporting its biggest single-day jump in cases.

The vast rail system - which usually carries more than 20 million passengers a day - was halted in late March, leaving millions of rural migrant workers unable to return home after losing their jobs in cities. New Zealand, meanwhile, will phase out its lockdown over the next 10 days, although some restrictions will remain. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern warned "none of us can assume COVID is not with us", but said the country had only 90 active cases after a seven-week lockdown.

"Your efforts, New Zealand, have got us to this place ahead of most of the world and without the carnage that COVID has inflicted in many other places," she said in a televised address. "But there are risks ahead, so please be vigilant." Extended periods at home have given some people a chance to gather testimony on life in confinement, with the Museum of London launching an appeal for items that reflect the experience.

"When we knew there was going to be a lockdown, we started straight away talking about what we needed to collect something for the future," Beatrice Behlen, the museum's senior curator, told AFP. "It could be something that gives you comfort - one example mentioned often is maybe your favorite slippers - you've been wearing them every day." — AFP

reacted by saying Washington "should not plot against the Iranian nation every day," adding that the Islamic republic had "protected this waterway for thousands of years".

The friendly-fire incident occurred near the Strait of Hormuz, a chokepoint for a third of the world's seaborne oil. The escalation of Iran-US tensions last year saw ships mysteriously attacked, drones downed and oil tankers seized in the strait. In July 2019, Iran's Revolutionary Guards seized the British-flagged oil tanker Stena Impero in the waterway for allegedly hitting a fishing boat and released it two months later. The Guards seized at least six other ships that year over alleged fuel smuggling.

Tensions have escalated since 2018 when Trump withdrew the United States from a multinational accord that froze Iran's nuclear program, and reimposed crippling sanctions on its economy. Iran's armed forces in January mistakenly shot down a Kiev-bound Boeing 737 passenger jet shortly after takeoff from Tehran, killing all 176 people aboard. The military admitted to the catastrophic error, saying it came as Iran's air defenses were on high alert after firing a barrage of missiles at US troops stationed in Iraq. Iran launched the missiles in retaliation for the United States' killing of its top general Qasem Soleimani in a drone strike days before that. — AFP

## Kuwaitis spared salary cuts...

Continued from Page 1

The Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI) said yesterday that medical permits for hospitals and clinics can be obtained through the site <https://curfew.paci.gov.kw>. PACI said people on arrival must show the permit, and in case of any discrepancies, such persons will be barred from obtaining permits in the future.

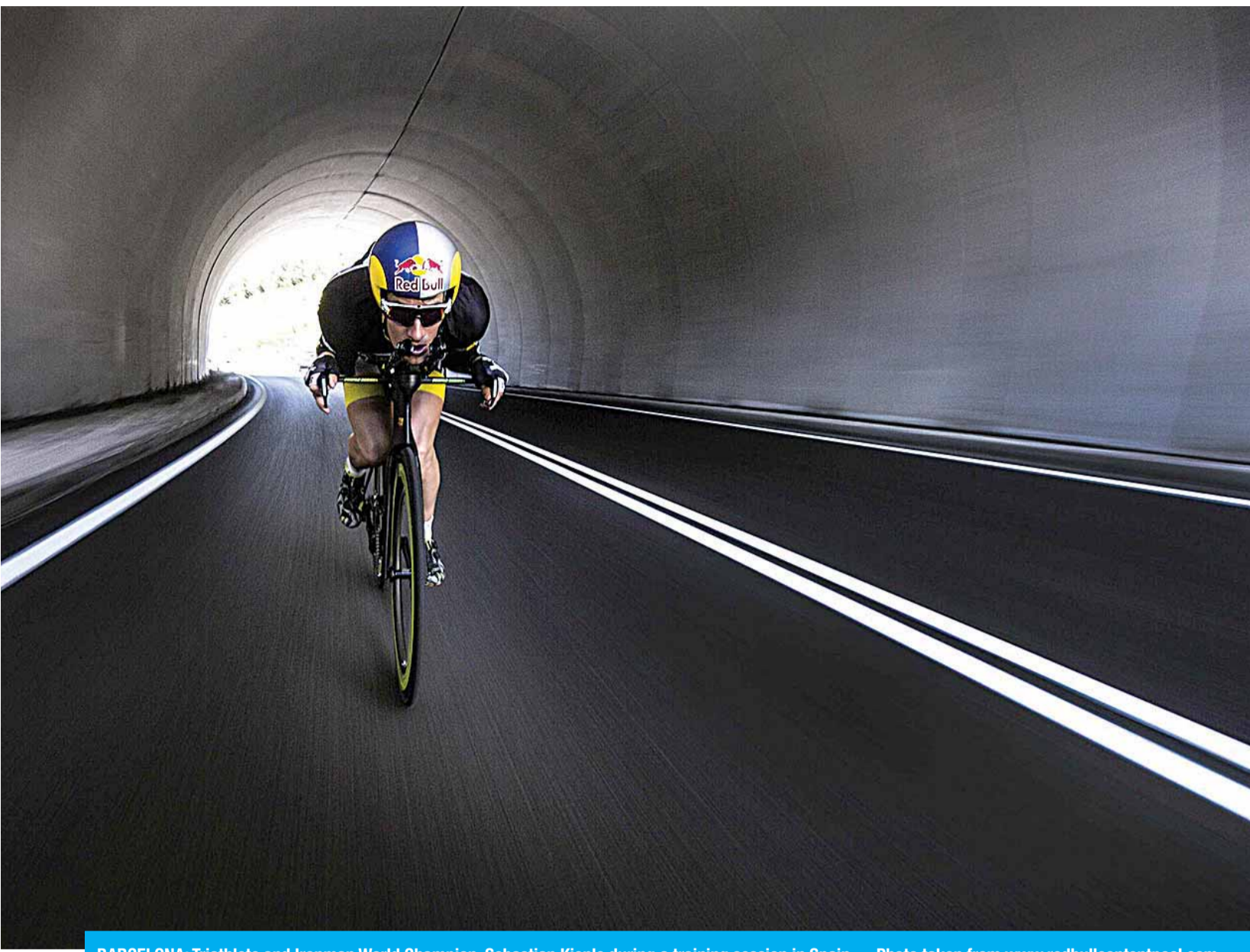
The National Assembly's office has decided to hold an emergency session on Wednesday to discuss gov-





## Sports

Photo of the day



BARCELONA: Triathlete and Ironman World Champion, Sebastian Kienle during a training session in Spain. —Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

## Bundesliga could provide blueprint for NFL: McCarthy

LOS ANGELES: The National Football League has time on its side as the sports world prepares to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic and will use some of it to observe German soccer's Bundesliga as a potential blueprint on how to deal with the outbreak.

The NFL, which is due to kick off on Sept 10 and has not yet seen its schedule affected by the novel coronavirus, is paying close attention to protocols other leagues, particularly the Bundesliga, are putting in place in a bid to restart play, according to a report in Newsday.

The top-flight Bundesliga season will restart on May 16, making it the first European league to resume amid the pandemic that has infected more than 3.95 million people globally and killed more than 270,000.

"We've been in contact with all domestic leagues, but also sports organizations around the world," Brian McCarthy, the NFL's vice president of communications, told Newsday. "We have a number of protocols, see what works, see what can translate into our sport."

"We're all in the sports business, but every sport has its own matters to attend to."

Germany's top flight will resume under strict health protocols, with no fans allowed in stadiums.

All teams have had to go into a seven-day training camp in complete isolation with players tested before their inclusion in the camps to reduce the risk of any infection.

About 300 people, including players, staff and officials, will be in and around the stadiums during matchdays.

The NFL unveiled its 2020 schedule on Thursday with the expectation of playing games with fans in the stadiums but is approaching the season with some caution.

League commissioner Roger Goodell has informed teams they will be required to have a ticket refund policy in place for cancelled or disrupted games.

McCarthy told Newsday: "We're looking at what we can adopt, what we can modify that is working in other sports, sharing best practices". —Reuters

# New Zealand's Super Rugby teams back in action from June 13

## New Zealand hopes to set example for world sport

WELLINGTON: New Zealand's five Super Rugby teams will play each other in a 10-week domestic competition from June 13, bringing comfort to "Kiwis doing it tough" and inspiring a sports world brought to a standstill by the COVID-19 pandemic.

New Zealand Rugby (NZR) made the announcement yesterday after the government confirmed it would take its alert level down a notch from Thursday, with the rate of new coronavirus infections having slowed to a trickle.

New Zealand is the first major rugby nation to announce a restart to competition since the outbreak of the novel coronavirus shredded the global sports calendar in March.

"It's obviously fantastic news for the game right across the country," NZR Chief Executive Mark Robinson told reporters in a video call yesterday. "It's been a challenging time right around the country so if this acts in any way to provide leadership and hope and some inspiration to Kiwis that are doing it tough, it will be fantastic, obviously."

"I think a lot of people around the world are obviously watching us and being in touch around how we're approaching it ... not only for New Zealand but right around the sporting world."

"So it's critical we do it well." "Doing it well" will mean teams flying in and out on chartered planes on match days and playing at closed stadiums until authorities are willing to allow spectators back into venues.

Players will be checked daily for symptoms and asked to be even stricter on themselves than the country's Level 2 alert regime that permits people to travel, eat at cafes and go to cinemas from Thursday.

"So we are holding them to a slightly higher standard than the general public," NZR Acting Medical Advisor Dr Deb Robinson told reporters. "Because we really, really want this competition to go well and they really want to play."

The competition has been endorsed by Super Rugby's governing body SANZAAR but will have no bearing on the wider tournament which also includes teams from Australia, South Africa, Argentina and Japan.

Super Rugby was suspended in March after seven rounds and may not resume in 2020 due to travel curbs and border controls. The New Zealand competition will be broadcast live by Sky Sport, with two matches held on Saturdays at 5.05pm

(0505 GMT) local time and two more on Sundays at 3.05pm (0305). In the opening weekend, the Otago Highlanders will host the Waikato Chiefs in Dunedin, with the Auckland Blues at home to the Wellington Hurricanes on Sunday. Defending Super Rugby champions Canterbury Crusaders will have a bye in the first week.

Players will have a month to get fit for the hastily arranged tournament, with Robinson not even sure if it would have a winner's trophy. NZR added that the country's annual provincial competition, the Mitre 10

of a hand injury and has spent the lockdown rehabilitating.

"It was really cool to put the kit back on," he told reporters via Zoom from Canberra.

"I think you draw a lot of energy even though we're not right next to each other, just from being in each other's presence there as well."

"It's a lot of good feel stuff at the moment. A lot better vibes than this time a month ago. I guess we'll see once we really get going up tomorrow."

Australian rugby could do with some "good feels" after a torrid few weeks in which the governing body lost a chief executive and a chairman-elect as well as the most likely candidate to lead them into an uncertain future.

Rugby Australia has huge debts and is yet to have its 2019 accounts signed off so is desperate to get its teams back on the pitch to get some revenue flowing.

Western Force, the Perth-based team axed from Super Rugby in 2017 to cut costs but kept alive by mining billionaire Andrew "Twiggy" Forrest, are widely expected to join the Australian domestic competition along with the four Super Rugby franchises.

That will make for some interesting negotiations for interim chief executive Clarke, who was instrumental in the acrimonious process of axing the Force when he was Rugby Australia's Chief Operations Officer.

"Decisions were made back then for reasons back then," Clarke said last week. —Reuters



TAMWORTH: New Zealand Warriors rugby league team players wait to collect their luggage in the arrivals hall after arriving in Tamworth late on May 3, 2020, after the National Rugby League (NRL) secured an exemption for the team to enter the country ahead of a planned resumption of the sport. —AFP

Cup, would start with a full 14-team championship from Sept. 11.

However, the international schedule remains up in the air. The All Blacks' July tests against Wales and Scotland are in doubt, along with the southern hemi-

sphere's annual Rugby Championship, which starts in August.

Robinson said NZR was still working out scheduling for resuming women's competition, including internationals. —Reuters

## Brumbies back in training as Australia prepares for return

SYDNEY: The ACT Brumbies returned to the training ground in Canberra yesterday, the first of Australia's four Super Rugby sides to do so after social isolation measures introduced to combat COVID-19 were eased around the country.

Neighbouring New Zealand, which has enjoyed similar success in containing the novel coronavirus, announced on Monday its Super Rugby sides would take part in a domestic competition and Australia is expected to follow suit.

With the resumption of Super Rugby impossible because of international travel bans, interim Rugby Australia chief executive Rob Clarke said last week the governing body was hoping to have a domestic competition in place by July.

There are still some restrictions in place, however, so the first Brumbies players return yesterday were limited to training in groups of 10 with no contact permitted.

Wallabies prop Scott Sio missed what looks like being the final Super Rugby match anywhere in the world this year — against the New South Wales Waratahs on March 15 — because

## Hamilton has only himself to beat online

LONDON: While Formula One rivals compete in virtual grands prix and various esports series during the COVID-19 lockdown, six-times world champion Lewis Hamilton has been busy racing against himself.

The Briton has been a keen gamer since boyhood and for some years a brand ambassador for the Gran Turismo franchise on Sony's PlayStation.

"I've been working with them the last couple of years and I got to do this challenge, beat my time kind of thing," the 35-year-old said in a Mercedes video interview discussing what he had been up to in the absence of real racing.

"So I've been racing myself, trying to beat my own laps and stuff. It's been frustrating as hell because my laps are pretty decent I think."

The Lewis Hamilton Time Trial Challenge also has a 'ghost car' to mimic racing against the Mercedes driver as well as video tutorials.

Hamilton said he had also played the Call of Duty shooter game with AlphaTauri's Pierre Gasly and Ferrari's Charles Leclerc, who has won two of four official F1 virtual races so far.

Ferrari's Sebastian Vettel, a four-times world champion with Red Bull, made his esports debut this month after being sent a simulator to use at home but Hamilton said he was "not very interested" in that.

"I never drive the simulator, very rarely," he explained. "I think with simulators it's very, very difficult because the movement is never perfect."

"You're at home with the simulator, so the seat doesn't move. The mind is telling you the car's moving but you're not getting cueing of movements."

"You have to kind of override your mind and I don't really like doing that, going through that process. Then you get in the real thing, and it's completely different."

"I don't find it personally any benefit whatsoever doing simulation things. But the actual fun and gaming side of things, when you get to play with friends and people online, that's the fun stage."

Formula One has not had a race since last December but is hoping to get the season going in Austria without spectators in July.

In the meantime its virtual races have filled the gap on what would have been grand prix weekends with regular drivers and sporting celebrities such as Manchester City striker Sergio Aguero and golfer Ian Poulter.

Hamilton said he was raring to get going for real after months of waiting. —Reuters

## Sports

# Euro leagues move at different speeds to resume playing

## Germany plans to be first of the five 'big' leagues to start

**PARIS:** As European leagues prepare to return from the enforced coronavirus break, screening tests are revealing cases in various championships, although, as yet, not calling into question plans to resume playing.

Germany still plans to be the first of the five "big" leagues ahead of Spain, England and Italy - France has declared its season over - to kick off on May 16, behind closed doors, despite the sobering events at Dynamo Dresden.

The second-tier club were ordered to self-isolate for 14 days on Saturday after testing uncovered two fresh coronavirus cases.

"It's not a reason to call the entire season into question," league CEO Christian Seifert told German broadcaster ZDF.

"It was always clear to me that this could happen. We're at the very beginning of the restart."

Seifert warned, however, that further coronavirus cases could jeopardise plans to end the season by June 30.

"It can reach a scale where it's not feasible anymore," he said. "It would depend on how much time there is left to finish the season."

Matches will be played behind closed doors and with a maximum number of 300 people, including both teams, allowed at each game.

In the run-up to the restart, all teams must go into a one-week quarantine training camp.

The German league said on Thursday that 1,724 tests at the 36 clubs in the top two divisions conducted in two rounds yielded 10 positives in the first batch and two more in the second.

Those include two players and a fitness coach at Cologne and a player and a physiotherapist at Borussia Mönchengladbach, but only the individuals concerned were placed in quarantine and the teams continued training.

### THREE CASES IN BRIGHTON, FIVE IN SPAIN

In the English Premier League, which hopes to resume from June to August, a third Brighton player tested positive on Saturday and was placed in isolation, the club's chief executive Paul Barber told Sky Sports.

The player was not named. One Brighton player tested positive in March and another in April and have recovered, the club said.

"It is a concern," Barber said. "Despite all of the measures that we've been taking over the past few weeks, where the players haven't been involved in any significant training at all, we've still suffered another player testing positive for the virus."

Elsewhere, players at Chelsea and Norwich as well as Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta tested positive while players at Leicester, Everton and Bournemouth all self-isolated after showing symptoms but clubs did not confirm if they tested positive.

Representatives of the Premier League and clubs are due to meet on Monday to discuss the final details of the "Project Restart", including the organisation of matches behind closed doors, on neutral ground and the extension of player contracts.

In Spain, players in the top two divisions were allowed to carry out individual work at training grounds last week at the start of a programme aimed at restarting competition in the middle of June.

On Sunday, La Liga said five players and three non-playing individuals had tested positive.

The five players, who have not been named, will be quarantined at home and tested again "in the next few days".

La Liga president Javier Tebas said he hopes the tournament can resume on June 12. "I would



SEVILLA: A handout picture released by the Real Betis football club shows Real Betis' Spanish midfielder Carles Alena taking part in a training session at the Luis del Sol training ground in Sevilla on May 10, 2020. —AFP

like it (the season resuming) to be June 12, but it will depend on the numbers," Tebas told Movistar. "In the end it will be up to the health authorities."

### CASES IN ITALY AND PORTUGAL

In Italy's Serie A, which resumed individual training this week, four Sampdoria players, including one who had previously recovered, and three from Fiorentina have tested positive for coronavirus, the clubs announced on Thursday.

Clubs will have to wait until May 18 at the earliest to start group training, and the sports minister warned on Wednesday that it was "impossible to set a definite date" for the

resumption of matches.

AC Milan technical director Paolo Maldini, who is recovering, and Juventus striker Paulo Dybala, who has been given the all clear, were among the most notable early football victims.

In Portugal, three players at top-flight Vitoria Guimaraes have tested positive.

"They are clinically healthy, asymptomatic and in quarantine," the club said in a statement on Saturday.

The government announced on April 30 that the first division was authorised to resume from the last weekend in May, behind closed doors and subject to the approval of a health protocol. —AFP

## Ginn Jr claims he beat Bolt

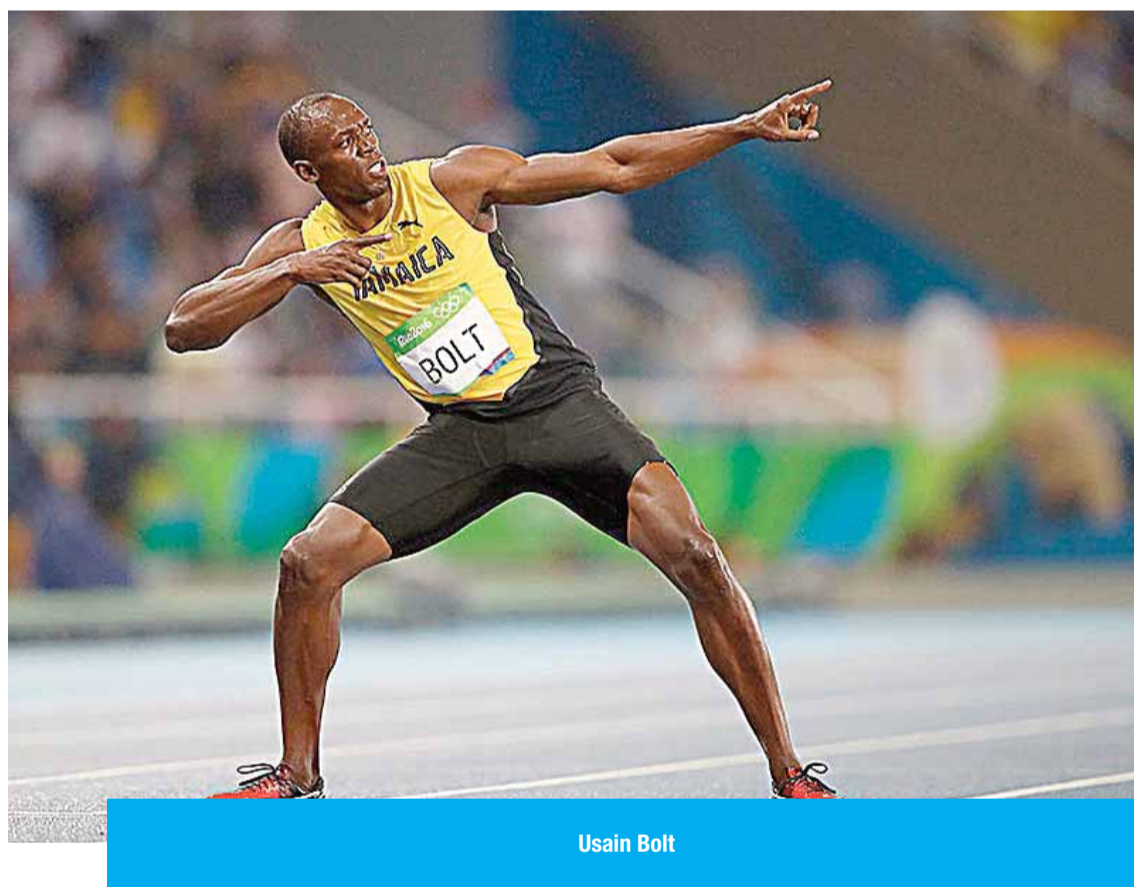
**NEW YORK:** Ted Ginn Jr. has been turning heads with his speed throughout his NFL career, and now the veteran wide receiver is doing the same with his recent comments to TMZ. Ginn, 35, told TMZ that he defeated Olympic gold medalist Usain Bolt in a race during high school.

"Well I ran against Usain Bolt. I got him when we were in the 12th grade. All of the top guys that won in the Olympics between 2004 until now, I basically had a chance to race them guys in high school," Ginn said.

When asked to confirm that he indeed defeated Bolt — who is generally regarded as the fastest human being alive — Ginn was quick with his response. "Yeah. I got that. You can go look that up," he said.

Ginn's bragging didn't end there. He said had he not gone to the NFL that an Olympic gold medal "for sure" would have been in his future. Bolt, 33, is an eight-time Olympic gold medalist.

The Chicago Bears signed Ginn to a one-year contract earlier this month. He caught 30 passes for 421 yards and two touchdowns for the New Orleans Saints in 2019, and has 409 career receptions for 5,702 yards and 33 scores in 187 games with six teams since 2007. —Reuters



Usain Bolt

## Players must play, with crowd or no crowd: Pietersen

**MUMBAI:** The resumption of sport will lift morale for people around the world during the COVID-19 crisis and cricketers owe it to fans to play behind closed doors if that hastens the process, former England captain Kevin Pietersen has told Reuters.

The spread of novel coronavirus has brought sport across the world to a standstill over the last two months and Pietersen thinks every effort should be made to resume professional cricket as soon as it is safe to do so.

"Fans, the public, need a morale boost. Their morale at the moment is so negative, so down in the dumps," the 39-year-old said in an interview.

"Sport is so uplifting and so positive for so many people. New sport will have to be played behind closed doors until we find a vaccination for coron-

avirus. Sportsmen have got to deal with it."

With golfer Rory McIlroy preparing to play a charity event on May 17 and English soccer's Premier League plotting a return for mid-June, Pietersen finds in unfathomable that any top athlete would not want to be plying their trade as soon as possible.

"Some sportsmen are in the prime of their life. Why would they not want to be playing?" he added. "So what if the crowds are not there? The crowds may not be there in person but the broadcasting numbers will be massive."

Looking more broadly at a possible silver lining to the crisis, Pietersen said it was an opportunity for his sport to have a serious look at solutions to problems shared by the entire cricketing world.

"The nice thing, if you can have a look at something that's nice about this coronavirus, is it's affecting absolutely everybody," Pietersen said. "Virat Kohli is in the same position as Kane Williamson as Joe Root to Steve Smith as Quinton de Kock ... we're all in this together."

"So we've all got to come together, understand what's important to us, work together, get through

Partick Thistle's relegation to League One now looks certain, while Falkirk will be denied promotion after finishing a point behind Raith Rovers when the pandemic stopped play. Hearts will be relegated if, as seems likely, the Premiership is also abandoned.

The fall-out has been bitter, with Falkirk claiming Scottish football had become an "utter shambles", Partick Thistle calling Premiership clubs "thoughtless and selfish" and Hearts accusing their rivals of "appalling disrespect".

Doncaster wants a show of unity to halt the fighting and on Sunday he told BBC Radio Scotland: "This is a passionate game and clearly when football is not being played and businesses in general are under massive pressure, you can expect passionate comments to be made."

this together and make good decisions together."

Always a big favourite with fans, Pietersen hit 23 centuries and scored more than 8,000 runs in 104 tests for England before finally hanging up his bat in 2018 after a few years playing for club teams across the world.

South Africa, where he was born and raised, remains close to Pietersen's heart and along with his work as a cricket pundit and business interests, he has become closely associated with the conservation of endangered animals in the country.

He is particularly identified with the battle to preserve the rhinoceros and the charity he founded, SORAI or Save our Rhino Africa/India, rescues abandoned, injured or orphaned rhinos.

"When we come out of this global crisis, as humans we have to play a bigger and more significant role in making sure we protect the planet and protect all the species," said Pietersen, who will relaunch the brand at the end of June.

"There's no way we can afford to let animals like the rhino go extinct, the pangolin go extinct. It's just incomprehensible to even think that something like that can happen." —Reuter

"I think it's unfortunate because passionate claims don't help the cause. "The more we have criticism and infighting, the more difficult that is because instead of working on a plan to get games back up and running, me and my team are appearing on programmes like this trying to defend rather than getting on the front foot and getting games back on as soon as possible."

"Clearly nobody expected a line would have to be drawn under the lower-league season at this stage because of the Covid-19 crisis but we have to deal with the consequences." Hearts have threatened a formal challenge if they are consigned to relegation and Doncaster responded: "Clubs must do what they feel is right for themselves but ultimately legal action against the league is legal action against the clubs." —AFP

## Bundesliga teams in isolation ahead of season restart

**BERLIN:** German soccer teams started the week in isolation yesterday after going into seven-day quarantine ahead of the Bundesliga season restart on Saturday, with club bosses saying completing the campaign amid the coronavirus outbreak will not be easy.

The German Football League (DFL) decided last week to resume the first and second division from May 16 after a two-month suspension, making it the first major sports league to attempt a restart.

Teams have been sent into mandatory seven-day isolation after testing for the virus in order to reduce the risk of infection before playing in empty stadiums with only a handful of staff and officials, to help prevent the spread of the virus.

Several clubs, including champions Bayern Munich, Borussia Dortmund and VfL Wolfsburg, have picked hotels in their cities to cut travel times to training locations and airports for the weekend matches.

Others like Schalke 04, who face Dortmund in the Ruhr valley derby, and Borussia Mönchengladbach are using hotels at their stadiums. Bayer Leverkusen and Union Berlin have moved to more isolated hotels in the countryside, as have bottom club Paderborn who will spend the week in a nearby thermal springs town.

Players and staff wore face masks as they departed for hotels where distance between tables at team lunches and dinners will become routine, as will single rooms where players will make their own beds to reduce unnecessary contact with other people.

Plans to restart, however, suffered a setback on Saturday after the entire team of second tier Dynamo Dresden was placed in two-week quarantine following two positive coronavirus tests. "We always expected that the remainder of this season will not be trouble-free," Borussia Dortmund Chief Executive Hans-Joachim Watzke told the Funke media group. "These tests and results are also a sign of our transparency."

The league, desperate to complete the season by June 30, has drawn up a detailed set of regulations for training and matches, including stringent testing that helped it get the government's green light to restart.

But with the virus far from gone in Germany where almost 170,000 people have been infected and over 7,400 have died, the DFL is concerned any positive virus cases could seriously damage chances of finishing the season, and inflict potentially "existence-threatening" financial damage to some clubs.

"I expect everyone now to live up to their responsibilities," DFL CEO Christian Seifert said at the weekend. —Reuters

## Scottish chief urges unity after reconstruction row

**GLASGOW:** Scottish Professional Football League chief executive Neil Doncaster has pleaded with clubs to work together to get through the coronavirus crisis after reconstruction talks collapsed. Several Scottish Premiership clubs decided to block any plans for reforming the leagues in the aftermath of the vote to cancel the Championship, League One and League Two seasons because of the pandemic.

**18** New Zealand's Super Rugby teams back in action from June 13



**19** Euro leagues move at different speeds to resume playing



**19** Ginn Jr claims he beat Bolt



## 11-year-old Brazilian shatter skating record



11-year-old prodigy Gui Khury had plenty of time to perfect his skateboarding skills.

**RIO DE JANEIRO:** The closure of schools in Brazil due to the coronavirus pandemic gave 11-year-old prodigy Gui Khury plenty of time to perfect his skateboarding skills as he became the first person to land a 1080-degree turn on a vertical ramp.

More than two decades after Tony Hawk completed the first 900-degree turn, Khury shattered a long-standing record by flying off the top of a ramp and completing three full spins in the air before landing cleanly and skating off. The manoeuvre has long been one of the holy grails of skateboarding.

"The isolation for the coronavirus helped because he had a life that was about school and he didn't have a lot of time to train, when he got home from school he was tired," the skater's father Ricardo Khury Filho told Reuters. "So now he is at home more, he eats better and he has more time to train and can focus more on the training so that has helped. "He has an opportunity

to train here, if he didn't have (the skate facilities) ... he would be stuck at home like everyone else and unable to do sport. So the isolation helped him focus."

During lockdown, Khury's family make the 20-minute journey to his grandmother's house on most days to deliver food and drop him off so that he can train on the vertical ramp, bowl and street course they had built in her back garden. It was on that ramp that the pre-teen completed his historic feat.

He was already the youngest skateboarder to complete the 900-degree turn, a feat he pulled off aged eight. "I was like, oh my God, what did I just do?" Gui Khury told Reuters on Sunday, two days after achieving his historic 1080. "I was just like OK, I landed

it. Now I am going to celebrate."

The boy's celebration was "mac and cheese at home" with his family. Skateboarding great Hawk landed the first 900 in 1999, nine years before Khury was born. Hawk was 31 when he successfully completed the trick calling it the biggest moment of his competitive career.

Fewer than a dozen skaters have achieved the feat in the years since. American Tom Schaar completed a 1080-degree turn in 2012 but on a mega ramp that gives skateboarders a higher speed and elevation in which to complete all three turns.

Khury's triple spin was recorded by his parents on their phone and posted on Instagram. "I sent it to all

my favourite skaters, like Tony Hawk, Bob Burnquist and Neal Mims," Gui Khury said from his home in Curitiba, in southern Brazil.

"Some posted it on their stories and some actually posted it on their Instagram. I was like that's so crazy, because it's like a once in a lifetime experience. "It's so amazing. It's the best feeling ever."

The skater's next task is to keep practicing the 1080-degree turn so he can complete the trick in competitions. Then, with the confidence that perhaps only an 11-year old can pass off, he imagines attempting skateboarding's next big milestone.

"1260. One person has done it only but it was on a mega ramp so it will be way (more) difficult for me," the boy said. "It could be (possible). You never know." Skateboarding is set to make its Olympic debut at the Tokyo Olympics, which have been pushed back to 2021 due to the coronavirus pandemic. —Reuters



### One person has done it only

## Sport bids to step out of virus shadow

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

### FOOTBALL

• On Monday, the English Premier League meets with clubs expected to debate a plan to complete the season behind closed doors at neutral venues. They would like to restart the season in June and play the remaining 92 fixtures by August. However, on Sunday, Brighton chief executive Paul Barber revealed a third player at the club had tested positive for the coronavirus. Two other Brighton players, who were not named, contracted the virus several weeks ago and have reportedly recovered. Liverpool have a 25-point lead at the top of the table.

— The German Bundesliga is set to be the first major European league to resume on May 16. The Bundesliga wants to complete the last nine rounds of matches before June 30 to secure around 300 million euros (\$325 million) in television money. Plans suffered a setback on Saturday when second division Dynamo Dresden reported two players had tested positive for the virus, prompting the club to place their entire squad into a 14-day quarantine.

— In Spain, La Liga is hoping to restart in mid-June but on Sunday announced that five players from the top two leagues had tested positive.

— Italy's footballers are taking part in individual training, with team groups starting on May 18. However, Fiorentina and Sampdoria announced ten positive tests last week. In addition, a Torino player tested positive.

— In France, Paris Saint-Germain have been declared Ligue 1 champions.

— South Korea had the honour of being the first league back in action on Friday but there were no crowds or wild goal celebrations — even talking was discouraged.

— The first official football to be played in western Europe since March took place on Saturday, behind closed doors in the Faroe Islands.

### CRICKET

— The English season will not start until July 1 at the earliest and likely behind closed doors. The new Hundred tournament has been scrapped until 2021. However, England could begin their rescheduled three-Test series against the West Indies on July 8. The series was originally due to start on June 4. Australia and Pakistan are still due to tour later in the summer.

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

### TENNIS

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

— The French Open at Roland Garros has already been moved to Sept 20-Oct 4 although there are suggestions that it may be put back by a further week. It could also be played behind closed doors.

— The United States Tennis Association will decide in mid-June on the US Open in New York.

### MOTOR SPORT

— After 10 races were either cancelled or post-

poned, Formula One hopes to open its season in Austria with back-to-back races on July 5 and 12. F1 boss Chase Carey insists that a 15-18 race season is still possible and that new venues could be used. Liberty Media, the company which runs the sport, reported a collapse in revenues of more than \$200 million (184.7 million euros) in the first quarter of the year.

— NASCAR will return on May 17 at Darlington Raceway, South Carolina.

— MotoGP hopes to start with back-to-back races at Jerez, Spain, on July 19 and 26.

### BASKETBALL

— NBA chief Adam Silver says 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 the lead contenders.

### BASEBALL

— MLB postponed its scheduled March start and various ideas on staging a campaign have been floated.

### ICE HOCKEY

— The National Hockey League shut down on March 12 and Commissioner Gary Bettman said the league is not in a race to resume.

### GOLF

— After the cancellation of the British Open, the remaining majors are the PGA Championship from August 6-9 in San Francisco and the rescheduled US Open from Sept 17-20 at Winged Foot, New York, with the Masters, usually played in April, scheduled for November 12-15.

— The Ryder Cup, at Whistling Straits, Wisconsin, from September 25-27, could take place without fans.

— The USPGA hopes its season can resume at the Charles Schwab Challenge from June 11 in Fort Worth, Texas.

— The LPGA Tour is due to resume on July 15 at

the Dow Great Lakes Bay Invitational tournament in Michigan.

— The European Tour is set to return at the British Masters from July 30.

### CYCLING

— The Tour de France has been rescheduled for August 29 from its original June 27 start date.

— The Giro d'Italia will take place from October 3-25 with a six-day overlap with the Vuelta a Espana and will be raced at the same time as three 'Monument' classics.

### ATHLETICS

— The Diamond League, which was to have started in Doha on April 17, should now kick off in London on July 4.

### RACING

— The Aintree Grand National was called off, and the first four English classics, the 1,000 and 2,000 Guineas due to have been staged last weekend, and the Oaks and Epsom Derby on June 5/6, have been postponed with new dates yet to be decided.

— If the June 16-20 Royal Ascot festival gets the go-ahead it will be staged in front of an empty grandstand with racegoers banned.

— In the United States, the May 5 Kentucky Derby, the first leg of the US Triple Crown, will now be run on September 5.

### RUGBY

— The NRL season in Australia will start on May 28.

— In union, the French Top 14 was abandoned but, in the southern hemisphere, the Super Rugby season, scheduled to end in June, could be played at same time as the four-nation international Rugby Championship in August and September. —AFP