



9 Promise of prosperity fades as austerity hits Saudis' pockets



15 Lion tamers live-stream shows from living room



19 With little competition, Bundesliga goes global



Ramadan KAREEM

Fajr	03:27
Dhuhr	11:44
Asr	15:20
Maghrib	18:33
Isha	20:00



7 deaths, 751 new virus cases; call to tax expat remittances

Round-the-clock Saudi curfew during Eid • Dubai reopens parks, hotel beaches

Veg shortage due to supply chain logistics

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: A problem with supply chain logistics may be leading to shortages of vegetables in some co-ops and fresh vegetables sitting in Al-Forda Market unable to reach the market. Citizens and residents have confirmed shortages of vegetables in some supermarkets in Kuwait, with many posting photos of their local co-op's empty shelves on social media.

Kuwaiti farmer Yousef Al-Kiribani told Kuwait Times that on the first two days of the total curfew, vegetables and fruits were returned to farmers. "They told us that no one bought our vegetables because most of the buyers did not have a permit," he said. He affirmed that

cases of coronavirus found in co-ops was one of the reasons why the vegetables were returned. "Today they say that the government gave vegetable suppliers a permit to work from 2 am until 10 am," Kiribani said.

The local market is only taking 25 percent of daily supplies of vegetables and fruits that arrive in Kuwait because only co-ops and other markets are buying, while the rest (75 percent) remains at Forda market and is going to waste, reported Al-Rai daily quoting Abdelwahab Al-Shaabani, director of human resources and administrative affairs at Forda.

According to Shaaban, there are seven reasons for the drop in sales: First, not enough permits were issued to outlets and vendors to buy from the market. Second, not allowing parallel markets in commercial areas to operate. Third, some markets have closed temporarily due to cases of coronavirus among their staff and as a result have lower purchasing needs.

Continued on Page 16

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The ministry of health announced 751 new coronavirus (COVID-19) infections in the last 24 hours, bringing the total to 11,028 cases, while seven deaths were reported as well, bringing fatalities up to 82. In the daily press briefing, Health Ministry Spokesperson Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said 169 patients are in intensive care, 77 of them in critical condition.

Earlier, the ministry announced the recovery of 162 patients, bringing the total to 3,263 recoveries. The new cases include 230 Indians, 193 Egyptians, 103 Kuwaitis, 72 Bangladeshis and the rest from other nationalities. Farwaniya governorate recorded 261 cases, Hawally 180 cases, Ahmadi 153, Capital governorate 93 cases and Jahra 64.

MP Salah Khorshid has called on the prime minister to ask the government to vote in favor of a draft law that imposes taxes on the remittances of expatriates. The lawmaker said the draft law was approved by the Assembly's financial and economic affairs committee about two years ago and it is already on the Assembly agenda, adding this is a good tool to provide the budget with new revenues and should be approved as soon as possible.

The National Assembly's emergency session scheduled for yesterday was to be cancelled after the government formally informed speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem it will not attend. Ghanem said he will

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Updates on COVID 19 Wed. 13/05/2020



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وزارة الصحة
Ministry of Health

مكتب الإعلام الصحي
Health Media Office

Sigh of relief as KU flights take home 234 Indians

By Sajeev K Peter

KUWAIT: Nearly 240 Indians detained in deportation centers heaved a sigh of relief as the Kuwait government flew them home free of charge yesterday on two Kuwait Airways flights. However, more than 10,000 Indians who availed a government amnesty are still waiting to be taken home.

According to a source, the repatriation of these Indian workers is expected from

next week onwards as the Indian government has opened its airspace enabling Kuwaiti flights to land at its airports. "Two Kuwait Airways flights carrying 117 people each took off to Indore, Madhya Pradesh state, today. Though they are from 20 different Indian states, they will be accommodated in a quarantine center in Indore now and will be moved to their respective home states once they complete their quarantine period," the source said.

The expats, who were detained in deportation centers for an unspecified period of time for various reasons, appeared excited. "We are very happy and excited to go home. I am going to see my people after six years," one of the passengers told Kuwait Times on the condition of anonymity by phone from Kuwait airport.

An embassy official said the repatriation of the people who are currently held in amnesty shelters will also start soon. The embassy is doing the state-wise groupings of people, so that Kuwait Airways can schedule the destination airports accordingly, the official added. According to estimates, more than 5,000 Indians with valid passports, but without valid residencies, availed the amnesty offered by the government. Another 5,000 plus people, who obtained emergency certificates from the embassy, are expected to leave too.

In an unprecedented initiative, the Kuwait government had offered amnesty-seekers free passage to their home countries as part of the program that aimed to

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KUWAIT: Indians who availed of the Kuwait government amnesty line up at the airport to leave yesterday.

Gloves, masks litter Mideast amid virus panic

BEIRUT: While walking in Beirut during the coronavirus lockdown recently, Omar Frangieh was struck by the number of face masks and gloves littering the Lebanese capital. The photographer, concerned that contaminated waste could itself transmit the disease, took 200 photos of discarded personal protective equipment and posted them in a Facebook album he titled "Invaders in Beirut".

From Baghdad to Gaza, the disposable masks and gloves that remain in high demand to protect populations from the coronavirus pandemic are discarded after use, adding to pollution. "The major concern though is the fact that this protective equipment is turned into a health hazard by being littered all over Beirut streets," Frangieh told AFP.

While the virus is usually transmitted by close human contact via respiratory droplets, studies show it can survive on some surfaces for days, suggesting that discarded gloves and

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Europe quickens reopening; Iran reopens mosques

BRUSSELS: Europe's re-opening gathered pace yesterday after weeks of coronavirus lockdown, while America's top infectious diseases official warned of uncontrollable new outbreaks if the process happens too quickly in the US. Austria announced its border with Germany would be unlocked following a two-month shutdown and Britons were allowed unlimited outdoor exercise, despite a global death toll closing in on 300,000.

In spite of their fears over the coronavirus, hundreds of pious Iranians took advantage of the temporary opening of mosques yesterday to pray at one of the holiest times of year. The mask-clad faithful for the most part adhered to social distancing guidelines as they sat in designated areas of Reihanat Al-Hussein mosque, in west Tehran.

Clutching their own prayer mats and Holy Qurans, they showed up with their families, including a couple with a baby, and appeared to be in high spirits. Worshippers spilled out into grounds outside the mosque were disinfected by a sanitary worker in a hazmat suit who sprayed them as he walked among them. But some of the gaps between those seated at the back appeared



TEHRAN: Iranians wearing facemasks attend prayers during Ramadan outside a mosque early yesterday. — AFP

to be too close for comfort, and the Basij militia were on hand to ensure they kept apart.

Curbs that have confined billions to their homes continued easing but the death toll spiked in some of the world's most populated countries, with Brazil, Russia and the US all reporting bad

news. It came as US government expert Anthony Fauci issued a stark warning to Congress about the dangers of resuming normal life too soon, saying a run of 14 days with falling cases was a vital first step.

Continued on Page 16

Local

No country refuses to receive citizens from Kuwait: Foreign Minister

Countries asked for time to prepare to receive their citizens: Sheikh Ahmad

KUWAIT: There is no country that refused to receive their citizens from the State of Kuwait who were in violation of residency law, the Arab Gulf country's Foreign Minister said Tuesday. "No country refused to receive its citizens, all countries are committed to providing care for their nationals," Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Mohammad Al-Sabah told an online news conference. Kuwait had in March urged all expatriates who were in violation of the residency law to come forward to register their personal information at specific centers, during the month of April, to be repatriated to their countries. The Ministry of Interior said those expatriates would be kept in special housing units with daily

meals, and would be sent back to their countries without paying for tickets.

"All countries acknowledged the arrangements by the State of Kuwait," said Sheikh Ahmad. Those countries, he added, asked for time to prepare themselves to receive their citizens. He also noted that countries like India, Bangladesh, Egypt and Sri Lanka were in complete lockdown, hence more time was needed for the repatriation of their citizens. Sheikh Ahmad said His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah contacted the leaders of those countries, and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah also spoke with his counterparts

with the objective of repatriation of their citizens.

Thousands of expatriates became stuck for weeks at shelters prepared to house visa violators due to complications in securing flights to transfer them back home amidst the global coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis. Kuwait had announced an amnesty in April for foreigners living illegally in Kuwait, by which they could apply to leave without paying any fines or airfare, with a chance to return to Kuwait in the future. Over 20,000 people have reportedly availed the amnesty, of whom many have already been repatriated, but many others remain in shelters waiting for their chance to fly back home.

In My View

Keeping our surroundings clean



By Abdellatif Sharaa

local@kuwaittimes.com

I did not think that I will be writing about the behavior of some people that I saw during two days into the total curfew, but I find it necessary to talk about such behavior, especially since we are under certain circumstances that do not allow for any unhealthy act and we must comply with rules and common sense.

The environment that surrounds the human being is part of his rights. It has an effect on health and living and in turn it affects the entire society, such as the right to clean air and water. So the protection of the environment is no longer a luxury; rather it has an influence on people's ability to live healthily and safely.

The first principle of the Stockholm Declaration in 1972 said: "Man has the fundamental right to freedom, equality and adequate conditions of life, in an environment of quality that permits a life of dignity and wellbeing, and he bears a solemn responsibility to protect and improve the environment for present and future generations. In this respect, policies promoting or perpetuating apartheid, racial segregation, discrimination, colonialism and other forms of oppression and foreign domination stand condemned and must be eliminated."

Bearing in mind the human being is no longer able to facilitate a sound healthy environment because there are so many challenges, such as the increased piles of trash in urban areas causing continued pollution of the surrounding environment and exposing the society to dangerous health risk. The common danger is in throwing trash in many places, around buildings or even in public places such as streets and parking lots.

Though trash includes many things resulting from man's activities, what concerns me is what is produced inside homes is then left in front of the buildings and even on the stairs in some cases, and this attracts stray animals, particularly cats and insects that are definitely harmful, besides some rodents that can be seen here and there.

Please cooperate with the authorities and place the trash in well-sealed bags, and put them out in proper containers at the prescribed time. This is to keep our surroundings clean and healthy. Oh, by the way, the coronavirus may hide in some trash components, so take care and be careful.

Final word: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

— Margaret Mead



KUWAIT: Large crowds of people practice walking and jogging exercise on Tuesday during the daily two-hour period (4:30 pm - 6:30 pm) allocated by the government during the total curfew. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Coronavirus in Kuwait: What we know so far

KUWAIT: Kuwait has recorded 10,277 cases infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) as of Tuesday, in addition to 75 deaths. With the exception of 158 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, 3,263 people have recovered completely after previously being infected with the virus, while there are 6,939 people receiving treatment and 2,619 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. Earlier, Kuwait enforced a country-wide partial curfew from 5:00 pm to 6:00 am, which was later extended to start from 4:00 pm until 8:00 am during Ramadan, while allowing restaurants and food stores to make home deliveries from 5:00 pm until 1:00 am. The government also locked down Mahboula and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh in a bid to contain the spread of the virus and enable health workers to test inhabitants. Earlier, the government decided to close all shopping malls, beauty salons and barber shops as part of its measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. The government also allowed supermarkets, restaurants and shops to host a maximum of five people at a time and in case there are lines, the distance must be at least one meter between people. The Ministry of Commerce launched a website (www.moci.shop) to enable people to book appointments to shop at co-operative societies in their areas. The Public Authority for Industry also announced that companies can apply to evacuate their workers from Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and Mahboula. To do so, they must fill a 'workers evacuation form' available on www.pai.gov.kw, and send the form via email to: Jasiri@moh.gov.kw.

Precautions

Kuwait halted all commercial flights until further notice, and has sent special flights to repatriate Kuwaitis back home from countries affected with the virus' spread. 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
As'ad Al-Hamad Dermatology Center: 98514508
Zain Hospital: 97552031
NBK Hospital: 96931761
Al-Rashed Allergy Hospital: 94162470
Infectious Diseases Hospital: 96989164
Palliative Care Hospital: 94024786
Sabah Al-Ahmad Urology Center: 90952469
KFH Addiction Treatment Center: 94169363

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

Mental health assistance

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

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

For information and other concerns, call 9401-4283.

Local

Some 366 citizens cross border with Saudi Arabia: Kuwait FM

Sheikh Ahmad inspects measures for citizens returning home via land



KUWAIT: Border control officers organize the arrival of Kuwaiti citizens from Saudi Arabia through the Nuwaiseeb border crossing on Tuesday. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

KUWAIT: Kuwait Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Mohammad Al-Sabah said some 366 citizens have crossed Nuwaiseeb border crossing from Saudi Arabia on Tuesday, marking the start of land repatriation. Sheikh Ahmad, at an online news conference, said there were 4,117 citizens who registered in the 'With You' platform, a tool designed to facilitate return of nationals. The government launched the platform, withyou.e.gov.kw, for citizens to register their personal information to facilitate their repatriation. Sheikh Ahmad urged Kuwaitis in Saudi Arabia who did not register in the platform to do so, and contact the Kuwaiti Embassy in Riyadh. He said many citizens did not wish to return, but he urged them to register in the platform "in case they changed their minds in future."

Sheikh Ahmad talked about the repatriation plan which brought around 30,000 citizens through numerous flights from 103 countries. "The plan was a challenge for all of us but we accomplished it due to the collaboration of all government departments," he said. Sheikh Ahmad expressed gratitude for His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for his desire to see citizens brought back home, as well as His Highness the Amir's appreciation of all those who contributed to the repatriation plan. The Foreign Minister cited challenges that faced the repatriation plan: citizens were in some 103 countries, some nations were in complete lockdown, the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in these countries and collapse of health care systems, as well as partial and full curfew in these countries which meant restrictions of movement.

Sheikh Ahmad, who also heads the national repatriation committee, inspected on Tuesday measures set to receive citizens returning to the country by land. Sheikh Ahmad headed to the Nuwaiseeb border point to check upon the measures set in line with the plan beginning today and lasting until May 20. He also headed to Al-Khairan Resort to look into the efforts carried out by first line responders in charge with the safety of those returning via land. — KUNA



Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed

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Photo of the day



KUWAIT: A giant portrait on the building of Sheraton Hotel in Kuwait City, with Arabic text that reads "Amir of Humanity... With God's help, Kuwait and its people will be safe."

Kuwaiti embassy in Bosnia distributes food

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Embassy in Bosnia Herzegovina has distributed 2,353 food parcels as part of a program to provide iftar meals to families in need. The embassy said in a statement on Tuesday the annual philanthropic

activity was carried out with donations from the Kuwaiti Awqaf General Secretariat. Kuwait's embassies worldwide provide iftar meals during fasting month of Ramadan. — KUNA



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Taking Control

By Dr Teresa Leshar

It is not unusual to sometimes feel overwhelmed by the many responsibilities of modern life – family needs, work schedules, social commitments, and the pressure to develop professionally or face obsolescence. It's also not uncommon to lack focus because of the many forces that take our attention in different directions, such as the constant notifications of our social media accounts, the allure of online entertainment, the boredom that drives us to local attractions, and our own physical needs for food, enjoyment and rest. All of these pressures and distractions weigh us down, making it difficult to sift out our goals, focus on achieving them, and build the life we dream of.

Fasting the month of Ramadan, in addition to being an act of worship and a gesture of gratitude for divine guidance, is a way to regain control of our lives. There are three levels of fasting.

The basic level of fasting is to abstain from eating, drinking, smoking and intimacy during daylight hours. To do this for an entire month

proves to us that no physical pleasure can control us; in fact, we take control of the food, the sugar, the nicotine, the caffeine, the sex. We prove to ourselves that we can control our impulses and regulate the physical demands of human life. This is not a small thing. And there's more.

The second level of fasting is to abstain from saying what shouldn't be said and seeing what shouldn't be seen. We refrain from expressing anger, sharing gossip, telling little lies, and watching violence, gore and sexual content on our screens. We realize that having control over our stomachs is insignificant if we can't take control of our tongues, ears and eyes. Exercising that kind of discipline for a month shields us from the problems we often bring upon ourselves when we say or do something spontaneously in reaction to others without pausing to consider the effects, or when we regularly experience what taints our best selves. The second level of fasting empowers us to regulate the social and recreational aspects of our lives. That is not

a small thing! But there's more.

The third level of fasting is to resist what is useless, negative and mundane and replace it with what is constructive, positive and beneficial. It's like cleaning your closet – getting rid of the clothes that are outdated, ill-fitting, worn out, or useless. Likewise, we purge our minds from old mindsets that hold us back, from ugly attitudes that accentuate our flaws, from excuses that keep us from being our best selves and from worthless clutter that crowds our minds. This naturally extends to activities, as we reevaluate how we spend our time and whether it contributes to our ultimate success and happiness.

If we apply the three levels of fasting and really focus on the physical, social and mental benefits, we will finish the month possessing the tools we need to stay in control of our lives. We will be able to control our bodies and minds, and we can focus our energy on achieving what really matters. We emerge from this annual training with enhanced feelings of autonomy and self-determination, greater belief in our potential for goodness and meaning, and powerful

Resist what is useless and negative

tools to help us meet our goals for the coming year. And when we falter and forfeit some of that control, Ramadan will revisit soon enough to reinforce its

valuable lessons.

But before we credit ourselves with too much strength, autonomy, and potential, let's take a moment to look at the source of this beautiful month. Our Creator, who knows inside out, has ordained this fast as a way to express our gratitude and become more conscious of Him. Practicing the three levels of fasting give us the clarity, strength and incentive to stay focused on the terminal point of this journey called life, which is standing before our Creator with our record in hand. It is here – when our deeds, words and thoughts are on display – that we will be thankful for Ramadan, when we learned to take control.

- 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 inter-faith interactions that promote social solidarity. For more information, please call 25231015/6 or e-mail: info@ties-center.net.

Local

Indian workers abandoned by restaurant owners without food and salary

Complainants appeal for embassy intervention

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: A group of Indian workers living in Mahboula lodged a complaint by sending emails to the labor office at the Indian Embassy in Kuwait and Kuwait Times over non-payment of salaries since March. According to the letter addressed to the embassy, there has been no communication by the company since March with 15 Indian workers who were hired to man two restaurants in Ardiya and Mahboula. "We humbly and respectfully regret to say that we are 15 Indians living in Mahboula block 1 working in

a burger restaurant company. For the last 2-1/2 months, we are not receiving any salary and till now we have five staff whose visas have expired. The restaurant owner doesn't reply our messages and calls. The management keeps on ignoring us," read their letter to the embassy and Kuwait Times.

"We are all going through tough and harsh conditions because we all have no money and no food as well. I hope you can help us so that our company will help us in this predicament," a worker named Khader told Kuwait Times. He said the problem is that despite several attempts to call the management for help,

there has been no reply so far. "We are surviving because fellow Indians living next door are providing us with something, like food, etc. They also share our problems with the Indian community," he added.

Another complainant said he hopes the Indian Embassy will be able to help them. "We don't know how long our friends will be able to provide for us and feed us. What we want is for the embassy to convince our company to pay us or at least send us some food so we can survive this curfew," he said. The Indian Embassy did not respond to inquiries by Kuwait Times on this matter.

News in brief

128 buildings quarantined

KUWAIT: Some 128 residential buildings are under quarantine due to the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), while 15 cooperative societies are under inspection, said a health official Tuesday. Undersecretary at the Health Ministry Dr Buthaina Al-Mudhaf affirmed that samples taken from the buildings' residents proved that over 1,000 individuals were infected with the virus. As for the markets, some 2,900 COVID-19 swipes were taken to determine the spread of the virus.

Facemask mandatory

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Health announced that wearing face masks or covering the face in any form is mandatory when going for jogging or for grocery shopping during curfew. Citizens and residents cannot go in public without wearing it, the ministry said, adding that social distancing is a must as well.

Co-op closed

KUWAIT: Al-Nuzha Co-op Society announced that 109 of its employees and two volunteers tested positive for the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). The co-op will remain closed until further notice.

Nine flights

KUWAIT: The Directorate General of Civil Aviation announced that nine flights were set to depart Kuwait International Airport yesterday. Two flights to Bangladesh, three flights to Egypt, two flights to India, one flight to Doha, and one for Kyrgyzstan. Total passengers on these flights was

Curfew violators

KUWAIT: Police arrested 21 curfew violators on Tuesday, including 18 Kuwaitis and three expats. The arrests were made as follows: two in the Capital governorate, six in Hawally, three in Farwaniya, four in Jahra, and six in Al-Ahmadi Governorate.

Oil price up

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti oil went up 29 cents to \$21.54 pb Tuesday as opposed to \$21.25 pb the day before, said Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) yesterday. Meanwhile, contracts of the West Texas Intermediate for June went up \$1.64 to \$25.78 pb, the same case with the Brent crude, going up 35 cents to \$29.98 pb.

Livestock owners, farmers can attend properties during curfew

KUWAIT: Kuwaitis who own livestock and farms can attend their properties on Sundays and Wednesdays throughout the full curfew, Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Mohammad Al-Jabri said Tuesday. Jabri, who is in charge of the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources, said owners of livestock and farms could go attend their properties between 7:00 am and noon time. His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah called for allowing the livestock owners and farmers to attend their properties, said Jabri, and the move was coordinated with Deputy Premier and Minister of Interior Anas Al-Saleh, with the major of maintaining food security. People will have to show documents proving their ownership of the livestock or farms for the security forces manning checkpoints nationwide, he said. Jabri said the government would spare no effort to support livestock owners and farmers. — KUNA

Residency violators assault policeman

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Interior confirmed that a gathering of residency law violators in Farwaniya was put under control. A group of residency violators protested and assaulted a policeman while reading out the names of those who were supposed to be sent back to their country. Security forces dispersed the protesters and arrested three agitators, according to a statement issued by the Interior Ministry's General Department of Security Relations and Media in response to social media reports of a riot and an attack on a policeman at an amnesty detention center in Farwaniya.

Meanwhile, the Interior Ministry said on Wednesday it has registered legal cases against nine news accounts for reporting misinformation and false news. The move is part of the ministry's efforts to fight rumors and baseless news reports amid the current extraordinary circumstances due to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), the ministry's General Department of Security Relations and Media said in a statement. The ministry's criminal security sector has seized the nine news accounts for publishing false news, according to the statement, warning that any rumormonger would be brought to accountability promptly. — KUNA

KPA stresses immediate moves since virus outbreak

KUWAIT: Kuwait Ports Authority (KPA) has moved immediately following the outbreak of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in China, said the authority's chief yesterday. Since January, it has issued several announcements and decisions that followed the guidelines of the World Health Organization (WHO), Sheikh Youssef Al-Abdullah said in a statement. "We have had messages and meetings by using remote communication programs with friendly and sisterly countries to share experience with them in this regard," he said. He added that the authority had also communicated with China's Port of

Shanghai, which could overcome the crisis with the least losses. He noted that his authority had done the same thing with the port authorities of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member states with a view to working out joint plans to address the crisis. In addition, the crews of incoming ships were tested for the novel coronavirus, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, the Kuwait Ports Authority's Director-General affirmed. All ships were also disinfected eight times a day, and commodities and containers sanitized, with all workers using masks and gloves, he pointed out. — KUNA

National Guard provide assistance



By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Kuwait National Guard took over the ration

supply branch at Khaldiya Co-operative Society upon the Ministry of Commerce and Industry's request. Guardsmen provided assistance as the co-op faced dif-

ficulties meeting customers' needs following the branch's temporary closure after a number of workers there tested positive for the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).



KUWAIT: Hilali fire station men removed a ring from a woman's finger, after they were called to Amiri hospital where the woman was admitted. The ring was cut out without causing harm to the patient. — By Hanan Al-Saadoun



Newborns among 16 killed in hospital attack in Kabul

As Yemen COVID-19 cases surge, sources see undercounting



NEW JALPAIGURI: Passengers sit in marked circles to maintain social distancing as they wait for the train to arrive at New Jalpaiguri railway station on the outskirts of Siliguri yesterday. —AFP

India unveils stimulus package

Trains start rolling again despite virus surge

NEW DELHI: India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi has unveiled a stimulus package worth 10 percent of the country's GDP to boost laborers and small businesses as the economy reels from the coronavirus pandemic and a weeks-long lockdown. The 20-trillion-rupee (US\$266 billion) relief plan for Asia's third-largest economy came as the country enters its 50th day under the world's biggest shutdown on Wednesday.

The economic package "will give a new momentum to India's development journey and put India on the road to self-reliance," Modi said in a special television address to the nation. "It is for the cottage, small and medium-scale industries." The government has credited its strict shutdown of almost all activity in the country of 1.3 billion people for limiting the number of virus cases, which currently stands at just over 70,000 infections, including 2,293 deaths. But the livelihoods of tens of millions of people have been badly hit, particularly the poor and migrant workers, many of whom have lost their jobs.

"Day laborers, migrant workers have suffered much in this period. It is our duty now to do something for them," the prime minister said. The funding announcement includes a smaller relief package announced at the start of the lockdown in late March and stimulus efforts by the central bank, Modi said. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman would unveil further details in the next few days, he added. The Indian leader stressed the need for the country to be self-reliant, and for people to buy local products to help the economy.

"The corona crisis has also taught us the importance of local supply chains... we have to now think local," he said. The president of Indian industry body FICCI, Sangita Reddy, welcomed the package and said it would "address the needs of the poor and needy, MSMEs (micro, small and medium enterprises) and also the industry and common man." Analysts said the package was a "much-needed boost for the Indian economy". "This is a good and bold step... as different sectors and small-scale businesses were desperate for relief," State Bank of Baroda chief economist Sameer Narang said.

Economic woes

India was already battling a liquidity crisis, bad loans and rising unemployment even before the pandemic arrived in India. Some 122 million Indians lost their jobs last month, data from Mumbai-based think tank Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy showed,

with small traders and daily wage earners accounting for the bulk of losses. The nation's key services sector plummeted in April, indicating a severe slowdown in the economy. Efforts to re-start activity in several industries as the lockdown was gradually eased have meanwhile stumbled amid a shortage of labor.

Many migrant workers have fled or are leaving India's cities on foot or on special train services to their home villages after struggling to feed themselves and their families amid the lockdown. Modi said the next stage of the lockdown, which is due to be lifted on May 18 after being extended twice, "will be different in many ways". "It will be based on suggestions received from states," he said, adding that an announcement would also be made in coming days. "Corona will be part of lives for a long time. But we cannot allow that our lives will just revolve around the corona crisis."



\$266 billion economic package

Trains start rolling

Meanwhile, India's enormous railway network tentatively ground back to life Tuesday as a gradual lifting of the world's biggest coronavirus lockdown gathered pace even as new cases surged. The country of 1.3 billion imposed a strict shutdown in late March, which Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has credited with keeping cases to a modest 70,000, with around 2,300 deaths. But the lockdown, which enters its 50th day on Wednesday, has torpedoed the economy, snatching the livelihoods of tens of millions of people and hitting the poor the hardest.

Whole industries have been devastated from tea plantations to diamond-polishing and there are fears of food shortages, while a ban on flights has left hundreds of thousands of Indians stranded abroad. Restrictions have been steadily eased, however, particularly in rural areas, and some Indian trains - on a network which normally carries over 20 million pas-

sengers a day - resumed on Tuesday. More than 54,000 tickets for an initial 30 services sold out online within three hours on Monday, reports said. Two trains left New Delhi on Tuesday afternoon with 2,300 people on board. Others left different cities including Mumbai.

The government has not set out a program for a timetable beyond May 20. There were limited special train services laid on after the lockdown was imposed to ferry home some of the millions of poor migrant workers left jobless and destitute by the shutdown. Many people, however, were forced to walk hundreds of miles (kilometres) to get home. Some died on the way, including 14 workers crushed by a goods train in Maharashtra last week. Passengers in face masks or with handkerchiefs over their mouths queued outside New Delhi station on Tuesday, waiting to be screened for coronavirus symptoms.

Ajay Dewani, a photographer stranded in Ghaziabad with a ticket for Chhattisgarh state said he walked for four hours to get to the station. "I haven't been paid for two months and my landlord was hassling us for rent," he told AFP, carrying a backpack and pulling a wheeled suitcase. But Usha, a laborer from Madhya Pradesh state, said she, her husband and their two children were turned away because they had no ticket. "We came here to the railway station as we were told that the trains will start working from May 12," she told AFP. "Where do we go now? We have no money to buy something to eat."

Cases rising

On Monday Modi held a video conference to discuss further relaxation of the lockdown when it ends on May 17 with state chief ministers. Some reportedly were critical of the measures being eased. In an address to the nation late Tuesday, Modi said further announcements about changes to the lockdown, which is due to lift on May 18, would be revealed in coming days.

He added that the lockdown, which has already been extended twice, "will be different in many ways" and have "new rules and regulations" as he announced a stimulus package worth US\$266 billion to boost the struggling economy. The number of cases is still rising in India, with more than 3,600 new infections recorded on Monday - just below Sunday's record of more than 4,000. Major cities including Delhi, Ahmedabad and Mumbai - home to the Dharavi slum area - have been worst hit by the new surge, and health specialists say infections may only peak in June or July. —Agencies

Forecast: A surge in child mortality

WASHINGTON: Deaths from preventable disease in children under five could rise by almost 45 percent over the next six months as the COVID-19 pandemic diverts scarce health resources in developing countries, a UN report said Tuesday. Poorer nations in Africa, Asia and Latin America could see an additional 1.2 million infants die over the period, according to the study published by The Lancet Global Health.

About 56,700 more maternal deaths could also occur in six months, beyond the 144,000 deaths that already take place in the same 118 countries, a rise of about 40 percent. The findings were based on a computer model that calculated the impact of a reduction in family planning, antenatal and postnatal care, child delivery, vaccinations and preventive and curative services. "Under a worst-case scenario, the global number of children dying before their fifth birthday could increase for the first time in decades," said UNICEF executive director Henrietta Fore.

"We must not let mothers and children become collateral damage in the fight against the virus. And we must not let decades of progress on reducing preventable child and maternal deaths be lost." The greatest number of additional child deaths would come from under-nourishment, and a reduction in treatment of neonatal sepsis and pneumonia. The study found that the 10 countries that could have the largest number of additional child deaths were Bangladesh, Brazil, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Uganda and United Republic of Tanzania.

UNICEF said it was especially alarmed at the knock-on effects of the pandemic. This included tens of million of children missing out on measles vaccinations, and some 370 million children who normally rely on school meals having to look for other sources of food. UNICEF said it was launching a new global campaign called "#Reimagine" to prevent the pandemic becoming a lasting crisis for children. The organization is issuing an urgent appeal to governments, the public, donors and the private sector to respond. —AFP

Workers' rights at risk as Indian labor laws face challenge

MUMBAI: Workers in India are set to face longer days and lower pay in a "race to the bottom," academics, activists and unions said, as six states plan to suspend labor laws to help industry recover from the coronavirus lockdown. Despite a spike in COVID-19 cases this week, India is looking to ease its seven-week lockdown amid increasing pressure from business leaders and ordinary people who say the strict curbs have destroyed the livelihoods of millions of workers. Labor specialists warn, however, that the decision of states to suspend federal and state labor laws enshrining workers' rights would push even more people into the informal sector, drive down wages and erode working conditions.

"It's not only regression, it's a deep slide into a bottomless pit and a race to the bottom of labor standards," labor economist KR Shyam Sundar, a professor at the Xavier School of Management said. "Other states will imitate (the six states)," he added. Under the planned labor law suspensions announced so far, working shifts in the six states

would be extended from eight hours to 12 hours for a three-month period. They also want to suspend legislation guaranteeing minimum wages and the formation of worker unions for up to three years, according to state documents seen by the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Social security benefits including welfare funds or provisions for the health and safety of women employees would also be waived in some states. Officials in the six states say the measures will help local industries to bounce back and reverse losses incurred during the weeks of lockdown, and also lure new investment. "This was done to improve investment and labor employment... We just want factories to restart," said one state labor official, speaking on condition of anonymity. The federal labor ministry did not respond to a request for comment.

'No income'

Already, more than 90% of India's 450 million strong labor force works in the informal sector with low wages and no social security. They have been hard hit by the closure of factories, building sites and other workplaces. Rahul Ahirwar, a construction worker in northern Haryana state—one of the six that plans to extend the working day, said he expected to work more hours for less pay when he returned to his job, regardless of the labor law suspension. "We work 10 hours in any case," he said by phone. "It's

going to be difficult from here on. Our employers have had no income. How will they pay us?" Trade union leaders said state governments had given businesses a green light to exploit workers. "The new rules will create more conflicts and increase slavery," said Lenin Raghuvanshi, convener of non-profit People's Vigilance Committee on Human Rights. Raghuvanshi, who has heard from workers being asked to work longer hours during the lockdown or being denied leave to go home, said states could have implemented softer measures such as overtime provisions instead of suspending labor laws.

'Balanced approach'

India has eight million modern slaves, according to Australia-based Walk Free's Global Slavery Index, and bonded labor is the most prevalent form of slavery in the country. Economists say even factories and shop floors in the formal sector would start operating like sweatshops if staff were working 12-hour shifts without social security. And for workers already enduring poor conditions prior to the lockdown, labor experts fear things could get far worse. "In most of the unorganized sector, the work hours are by default 12 hours and now the employer will extend it to 15," said Anoop Satpathy, faculty at the VV Giri National Labor Institute. "This (suspension of laws) will push many to poverty," said the former head of the labor



MUMBAI: Migrant workers gather outside Dharavi slums to board a bus during a nationwide lockdown imposed as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 coronavirus. —AFP

ministry's panel on minimum wages. While India's 28 states can make changes to the country's labor laws, such moves can be challenged in courts, according to parliamentarian Bhartruhari Mahtab, chairperson of the federal government's committee on labor. "Some of the changes being proposed may not hold up in the courts," he said. "No attempt should be made to trample the rights of the workers... industry does need to restart and therefore a balanced approach is the need of the hour." —Reuters

International

Britain's COVID-19 death toll tops 40,000, worst in Europe

Care homes data paints grim picture

LONDON: The United Kingdom's COVID-19 death toll now exceeds 40,000, by far the worst yet reported in Europe, raising more questions about Prime Minister Boris Johnson's handling of the coronavirus crisis. Figures published by the Office for National Statistics for England and Wales brought the United Kingdom's official death toll to 38,289 as of May 3, according to a Reuters tally of death registrations that also includes Scotland and Northern Ireland. Since then, at least 2,251 people have died from COVID-19 in English hospitals, according to the latest daily data, bringing the true death toll as of Tuesday to just over 40,000.

While different ways of counting make comparisons with other countries difficult, the figure confirmed Britain was among those hit worst by a pandemic that has killed more than 285,000 people worldwide. The data came a day after Johnson set out a gradual plan to get Britain back to work, including advice on wearing home-made face coverings - though his attempt to lift the coronavirus lockdown prompted confusion. The leaders of the devolved nations - Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland - said that advice given by Johnson only applied to England. They told people to stay at home still.

Such a high UK death toll increases the pressure on Johnson. Opposition parties say he was too slow to impose a lockdown, too slow to introduce mass testing and too slow to get enough protective equipment to hospitals. The data painted a grim picture in care homes, which have been especially hard hit by the virus. "Care homes (are) showing the slowest decline, sadly," ONS statistician Nick Stripe told BBC TV. "For

the first time that I can remember, there were more deaths in total in care homes than there were in hospitals in that week."

Care homes now account for a third of all COVID-19 deaths in England and Wales. "It is a relief to see the number of deaths in care homes falling, but they sadly they continue to make up a significant proportion of coronavirus related deaths and our work is not done," minister for care Helen Whately said in a statement. "Supporting the social care sector through this pandemic has always been a priority, and we are doing everything in our power to ensure they have all they need to look after those in their care."

A Reuters Special Report published last week showed care homes bore the brunt of policy designed to shield its hospitals from COVID-19, leaving many of the weakest exposed. Unlike the daily death toll announced by the government, Tuesday's ONS figures include suspected deaths from COVID-19, the respiratory disease caused by the novel coronavirus. In March, Britain's chief scientific adviser said keeping deaths below 20,000 would be a "good outcome". In April, Reuters reported that the government's worst case scenario was a death toll of 50,000.



50,000 more have died than normal: ONS

Sick man of Europe?

Even after adjusting for population, Britain still ranks among the countries worst affected by the pandemic, a list that includes Belgium, Spain and Italy. In Italy, the next worst-hit country in Europe and whose population is about 90% of Britain's, the death toll stood at 30,739 as of Monday, according to a measure



LONDON: Pedestrians walks across London Bridge in central London yesterday, as people start to return to work after COVID-19 lockdown restrictions were eased. —AFP

based solely on confirmed cases rather than suspected cases. Broadly comparable British data on Tuesday showed 32,692 deaths. Ministers dislike comparisons of the headline death toll because Britain's performance in part reflects the fact that it has been quicker to publish comprehensive data on COVID-19 deaths than other European countries.

They say excess mortality - the number of deaths from all causes that exceed the average for the time

of year - is more meaningful because it is internationally comparable. Early evidence, though, suggests Britain is faring badly on that front too. So far this year, there have been more than 50,000 excess deaths compared to a five-year average, ONS statistician Stripe said. The ONS said deaths from all causes decreased for a second week running as of May 1, but 8,012 more people than average died in the 18th week of 2020. — Reuters

Coronavirus: Latest global developments

PARIS: Here are the latest developments in the coronavirus crisis.

Nearly 290,000 dead

At least 289,138 coronavirus deaths have been recorded since the epidemic surfaced in China late last year, according to an AFP tally at 1900 GMT yesterday based on official sources. There have been more than 4,226,110 officially recorded cases in 195 countries and territories. The United States has recorded most deaths at 81,650. It is followed by Britain (32,692), Italy (30,911), France (26,991) and Spain (26,920).

Russia cases surge

As it begins to cautiously ease its nationwide lockdown, Russia becomes the country with the world's second-highest number of coronavirus infections at more than 232,000, according to an AFP tally. Containment measures remain in many parts of the country, including hard-hit Moscow which is on lockdown until the end of May, but other regions begin to lift some restrictions. Among the new infections is President Vladimir Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, who says he has tested positive.

Warning from Fauci

The US administration's top infectious disease expert Anthony Fauci warns that ending lockdowns too quickly could bring "severe consequences" including new outbreaks of coronavirus just as the country tries to overcome the pandemic. US Vice President Mike Pence, whose press secretary tested positive for coronavirus, has decided to "keep his distance" from President Donald Trump for a few days.

Coronavirus or not, migrants push on toward Europe

NIAMEY: Many Africans are managing to evade coronavirus lockdown barriers in Niger, the Sahel's migrant crossroads, as they press on with their perilous desert trek to the Mediterranean Sea and ultimately Europe. The migrant flow has slowed down but not dried up despite tight checks in the capital Niamey, and an increase of desert security patrols that have detained hundreds of people as desperate as ever to reach Europe, officials and former smugglers said. "Gambians, Senegalese, Malians, they are all determined to head there," said Alassane Mamane, a retired civil servant who lives in Agadez, a desert crossroads and departure point for many migrants heading to Libya on the Mediterranean.

"One migrant said to me: 'I would rather die from coronavirus than live in misery,'" Mamane said. Slipping through the holes of the net is becoming increasingly difficult. Since the anti-migrant plan set up in 2015 to reinforce patrols, security forces "have intensified further their surveillance to enforce border closing measures aimed at fighting the coronavirus," a local official said. Former people smuggler Idrissa Salifou confirmed it was now much harder for migrants.

"Before we could cross little by little but because of the anti-coronavirus measures (like border closures), the road is really blocked," Salifou said. "Soldiers comb the entire length of the border day and night. And on the other side, the Libyans have become very vigilant," he said. Niger, one of the



TIJUANA: Aerial picture showing gravediggers in personal protective equipment (PPE) burying a COVID-19 victim at the Municipality Cemetery #13 in Tijuana, Baja California State, Mexico. —AFP

Wuhan's mass testing

The Chinese city of Wuhan, original epicenter of the pandemic, plans to conduct tests on its entire population of 11 million people after new cases emerge for the first time in weeks.

Indian stimulus plan

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi unveils a \$270-billion (250-billion-euro) stimulus package to boost flagging growth amid the pandemic. It is worth about 10 percent of India's GDP.

Saving summer holiday

The European Union is set to present recommendations today to save the summer season in

Europe's tourism sector, including urging EU countries to gradually reopen shuttered internal borders. Irish low-cost carrier Ryanair says it plans to restore 40 percent of its flights from July, provided government restrictions on EU flights are lifted and health measures are put in place at airports.

Schools reopen in France

Thousands of primary and nursery schools reopen throughout France as the government eases its coronavirus lockdown rules despite some fears of a second waves of infections. Teachers wear face masks and the children's chairs are separated to avoid spreading the disease. — AFP



NIAMEY: Dozens of women wait on mats outside the Ossaka Gazoby central maternity hospital in Niamey. —AFP

world's poorest countries, has officially only recorded 781 coronavirus infections, with 42 people who have died from the COVID-19 disease. Niger has already decreed a state of emergency, closed its borders with Libya and its other neighbours as well as cut off the capital Niamey from the rest of the country.

'Skirt checkpoints'

Libya, where migrants have suffered from the violence and lawlessness that followed Moamer Kadhafi's overthrow in 2011, is also affected by the coronavirus. Nonetheless, migrants are heading to the Niger border communities Dirkou and Madama in hopes of entering Libya but measures have been taken to block them, according to Bourkari Mamane,

the mayor of Agadez, a large town in northern Niger. But the flow is far from drying up. Migrants "are trying in large numbers to enter Libya. They manage to skirt the checkpoints. The unlucky ones are picked up by military patrols," Boubakar Jerome, the mayor of Dirkou, a city close to Libya, told AFP.

In less than two months, more than 300 migrants have been caught by Niger's army along the border with Libya, the mayor said. In the past week, 33 migrants were detained in the same area, the mayor said. Bachir Amma, who heads an association of former people smugglers, said the migrants are as determined as ever. "They don't care about the coronavirus. In Agadez, some 'ghettos' have reopened and the migrants look for any chance to bound into the desert," Amma said. —AFP

News in brief

14 boys raped by 'pastor'

BUKAVU: Fourteen boys were raped by a man posing as a pastor in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, the Panzi Foundation said yesterday. The Bukavu charity hospital founded by Denis Mukwege, the Nobel laureate and gynaecologist hailed for his work with rape victims, said the children were admitted last month "in a state of suffering and psychological stress". The 30-year-old alleged attacker was arrested in late April, civil activist Julien Namegabe said. The victims came from different families and ranged in age from eight to 15. The suspect "bought their silence with small gifts for several weeks" according to the Panzi Foundation. Evariste Kajibwami, a clinical psychologist who has been following the boys since their admission to the hospital, said on the foundation's website that they "presented a mixture of sadness, fear and shame". — AFP

Three killed in Mali city

BAMAKO: Three people have been killed in the western Malian city of Kayes, a police official said yesterday, in unrest that began after an off-duty officer shot a youngster dead. Protests have been ongoing since late Monday, when a police officer attempted to stop a group of youngsters from riding their motorbikes, and subsequently shot and killed an 18-year-old named Seyba Tamboura. Mamadou Zoumana Sidibe, the governor of the Kayes region, said Tamboura's friends torched a police station during the night in response. They then barricaded themselves on a bridge in the city, where they remained yesterday. — AFP

Worker hit by hate mail

MILAN: An Italian aid worker, freed at the weekend after being held hostage for 18 months by Islamist militants in Africa, has been deluged with hate mail because she converted to Islam, judicial sources said yesterday. Magistrates have opened an investigation into the abuse to see if charges of aggravated criminal threat can be laid against some of the senders, the sources said. Silvia Romano was working as a volunteer in an orphanage in a village in southeast Kenya when she was seized by gunmen in November 2018. She was quickly smuggled across the border into neighboring Somalia, where she was believed to have been detained by the Islamist group al Shabaab. Romano, 24, was greeted by the prime minister and foreign minister when she arrived back by plane on Sunday, smiling broadly and wearing a hooded garment that covered her hair. — Reuters

Russia, China boycott meeting

UNITED NATIONS: Russia and China on Tuesday boycotted what Moscow called an "unacceptable" closed-door videoconference with the UN Security Council on chemical weapons in Syria. "Russia and China have empty tiles" on the screen, a Security Council member told AFP, speaking on condition of anonymity. During a virtual press conference, Russia's UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia said Moscow had one request: "That the interaction is conducted in an open setting." "Regrettably, our Western partners, and their allies, insisted on holding this meeting behind closed doors in an informal setting despite the slogans of openness and transparency of the Security Council," he said. — AFP

International

Newborns among 16 killed in hospital attack in Kabul

Blast at funeral in eastern Afghanistan kills 24

KABUL: Gunmen disguised as police attacked a hospital in the Afghan capital Kabul on Tuesday, killing 16 people including two newborn babies from a maternity clinic run by the international humanitarian organization Doctors Without Borders. In a separate attack the same day, a suicide bomber struck the funeral of a police commander, attended by government officials and a member of parliament, in the eastern province of Nangahar, killing at least 24 people and injuring 68. Authorities said that toll could rise. Islamic State Khorasan, the Afghan affiliate of the Islamic State militant group, claimed responsibility for the Nangahar bombing, the SITE Intelligence Group reported. Reuters could not immediately verify the report by SITE, which tracks online jihadist activity.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the Kabul attack. The Taliban, Afghanistan's main Islamist insurgency group which says it has halted attacks on cities under a US troop withdrawal deal, denied involvement in both. The Islamic State militant group operates in Nangahar and has carried out a number of high-profile attacks in Kabul in recent months. On Monday security forces arrested its regional leader in the capital. The violence, as the country battles the coronavirus pandemic, risks derailing movement towards US-brokered peace talks between the Taliban and an Afghan government long skeptical of the insurgents' renunciation of attacks.

Ministry of Interior photos showed two young children lying dead inside the hospital. An image showed a woman who had been killed lying on the ground still holding tightly to her baby, who a nurse

in the unit confirmed to Reuters had survived and had been moved to an intensive care unit at another hospital. President Ashraf Ghani condemned the attacks and said he had ordered the military to switch to offensive mode rather than the defensive stance it had adopted as the United States withdraws troops and tries to broker the talks.

"In order to provide security for public places and to thwart attacks and threats from the Taliban and other terrorist groups, I am ordering Afghan security forces to switch from an active defense mode to an offensive one and to start their operations against the enemies," he said in a televised speech. Meanwhile National Security Advisor Hamdullah Mohib said on Twitter: "there seems little



Gunmen disguise as Afghan police

point in continuing to engage Taliban in peace talks." In a statement, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo condemned "the two horrific terrorist attacks" in the strongest terms, noted the Taliban had denied responsibility and said the lack of a peace deal left the country vulnerable to such attacks.

Pompeo also described the stalled peace effort, which planned for intra-Afghan peace talks to begin on March 10 but have yet to occur, as "a critical opportunity for Afghans to ... build a united front against the menace of terrorism." The Pentagon declined comment on Ghani's stated intent to restart offensive



KABUL: An Afghan security personnel carries a newborn baby from a hospital, at the site of an attack in Kabul. Gunmen stormed a hospital on May 12 in the Afghan capital Kabul. — AFP

operations, saying only that the US military continued to reserve the right to defend Afghan security forces if they are attacked by the Taliban.

Mothers, children, nurses

The Kabul attack began in the morning when at least three gunmen wearing police uniforms entered the Dasht-e-Barchi hospital, throwing grenades and shooting, government officials said. Security forces had killed the attackers by the afternoon. "The attackers were shooting at anyone in

this hospital without any reason. It's a government hospital, and a lot of people bring in their women and children for treatment," said Ramazan Ali, a nearby vendor who saw the start of the attack. The 100-bed government-run hospital hosted a maternity clinic run by Doctors Without Borders, also known by its French name Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). Just hours before the attack, MSF had tweeted a photo of a newborn in his mother's arms at the clinic after being delivered safely by emergency caesarean section. — Reuters

Beat the heat? India struggles to keep cool during virus lockdown

NEW DELHI: With little access to air conditioners or parks during the coronavirus lockdown, India's poor - from farmers to slum-dwellers - could face deadly threats from heat waves this summer, climate and disaster management experts have warned. Crippling heat waves, drought and water scarcity usually grip India during the summer months of May and June. Authorities regularly issue advisories on how to keep cool, including advice to drink water frequently, find shady spots and use fans.

But following that advice could be more difficult this year with most of the country's 1.3 billion people trapped indoors as a result of a lockdown to try to stem spread of the coronavirus. Conditions will be particularly harsh for the poor living in small, cramped homes with no air conditioners, little ventilation and irregular water and power supplies. "Vulnerable communities are on the front lines of crises ranging from extreme heat (and) climate change to COVID-19," said Anjali Jaiswal of the US-based Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC).

"The risks of extreme heat are deadly. Heat is not merely an inconvenience, it kills," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation in emailed comments. India's virus lockdown - enforced beginning March 25 - quickly prompted tens of thousands of poor migrant workers to walk hundreds of miles back to their home villages in blazing heat, with scores falling ill or dying along the way. The past decade has been India's hottest on record, with extreme heat directly killing about 350 people last year, according to the national weather office.

Temperatures so far this year have hit 41 degrees Celsius (105 Fahrenheit) in New Delhi. Parts of the western desert state of Rajasthan have recorded temperatures of nearly 45 degrees Celsius (113 Fahrenheit) in recent weeks. Overall, the Indian Meteorological Department has predicted a warmer-than-usual summer between April and June. The forecast prompted the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) last month to issue special advice for dealing with heat waves during the lockdown.

It created lists of guidelines for workers ranging from vegetable vendors to farm and construction labourers, police and traffic officers. For example, it advised employers to schedule strenuous jobs at cooler times of the day, and to increase the frequency and duration of rest breaks for outdoor work - all while employees wear masks and maintain social distancing. Anup Kumar Srivastava, a drought and heat wave expert at the NDMA, said the agency was working not only to contain COVID-19, but also to save people from the "increasing intensity and severity of heat waves". High temperatures can cause dehydration, heat exhaustion and heat stroke, and worsen chronic cardiovascular and respiratory diseases. He said people who suffer such heat-related illnesses could be a challenge for overstretched hospitals already "struggling to cope" with more than 67,000 coronavirus infections. Srivastava urged states to launch COVID-19 specific heat action plans to "reduce the adverse effects of heat waves." — Reuters

As Yemen COVID-19 cases surge, sources see undercounting

DUBAI: Yemen has more suspected coronavirus cases and deaths than the authorities have so far reported, four sources familiar with the matter told Reuters, as the United Nations warned the virus is spreading in the war-ravaged country. The Saudi-backed government based in the south and the Iranian-aligned Houthi movement headquartered in the north have so far publicly announced a total of 67 cases with 11 deaths. Only two of those infections and one of the deaths was reported by the Houthi authorities, both in the capital Sanaa.

The sources said there was apparent undercounting in both the north and south of the country. The four sources, who have access to information from hospitals but who declined to be named, said Houthi health authorities had not shared additional test results with the World Health Organization (WHO) for at least 50 further patients with COVID-19 symptoms they were aware of at Kuwait hospital in Sanaa. Two of the sources said 20 other patients they had seen with similar symptoms died in that hospital.

The two other sources said they were aware of at least 30 suspected coronavirus cases admitted to another Sanaa facility, Sheikh Zayed hospital, and said test results for those cases had also not been shared. Reuters did not see medical records from the hospitals and could not independently confirm the numbers provided by the sources. The hospitals could not immediately be reached for comment. "Houthi authorities do not share the results of the tests with doctors and with the WHO when the results are positive," one of the sources told Reuters.

A spokesman for the Houthi movement, Moham-



SANAA: Yemeni workers spray disinfectant in a neighborhood of the capital Sanaa during an emergency lockdown in certain areas due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. — AFP

mad Abdulsalam, referred Reuters to the Houthi health ministry. The health ministry did not respond to a Reuters request for comment. On May 3, a Houthi official told a press conference in Sanaa that authorities had detected suspected cases and tested them but did not provide a figure or mention the results. Asked by Reuters whether it was concerned about a coronavirus outbreak going unreported in Houthi-held areas, the WHO said its role was to "actively advise, influence and inform" discussions on case declaration and reporting, which it said it had been doing for weeks.

It said it saw Yemen as "one country, one people" and cautioned against speculation related to "the number of probable cases not being reported". "Given the testing capacity in country, which is very limited, tests are being done on persons who meet the criteria or case definition and exposure history. We would not, and frankly no country would, be able to test

everyone who was sick or experiencing symptoms," it said in a statement. It said it was "operating under the assumption that full blown transmission is now occurring" across Yemen and that it was ramping up "community engagement and awareness activities."

The internationally-recognized government based in the southern port of Aden has accused the Houthis of covering up an outbreak in Sanaa, a charge the group denies. In a tweet on May 7, Information Minister Moammar Al-Eryani said there appeared to be a "serious epidemiological coronavirus situation" in Houthi-controlled areas and urged the authorities not to "conceal facts". However, the two sources said authorities in areas under the Saudi-backed government's control have also not fully disclosed the extent of the pandemic. At least 13 confirmed COVID-19 patients have died at Al-Amal hospital in Aden, they said. The hospital could not immediately be reached for comment. — Reuters

Facebook unveils initiative to take on 'hateful memes'

WASHINGTON: Facebook unveiled an initiative yesterday to take on "hateful memes" by using artificial intelligence, backed by crowd sourcing, to identify maliciously motivated posts. The leading social network said it had already created a database of 10,000 memes - images often blended with text to deliver a specific message - as part of a ramped-up effort against hate speech. Facebook said it was releasing the database to researchers as part of a "hateful memes challenge" to develop improved algorithms to detect hate-driven visual messages, with a prize pool of \$100,000.

"These efforts will spur the broader AI research community to test new methods, compare their work, and benchmark their results in order to accelerate work on detecting multimodal hate speech," Facebook said in a blog post. Facebook's effort comes as it leans more heavily on AI to filter out objectionable content during the coronavirus pandemic that has sidelined most of its human moderators. Its quarterly transparency report said Facebook removed some 9.6 million posts for violating "hate speech" policies in the first three months of this year, including 4.7 million pieces of content "connected to organized hate."

Facebook said AI has become better tuned at filtering as the social network turns more to machines as a result of the lockdowns. Guy Rosen, Facebook vice president for integrity, said that with AI, "we are able to find more content and can now detect almost 90 percent of the content we remove before anyone



CALIFORNIA: A woman shoots video of the sign at the entrance to the Facebook main campus in Menlo Park, California. Facebook has unveiled an initiative to take on 'hateful memes' by using artificial intelligence. — AFP

reports it to us." Facebook said it made a commitment to "disrupt" organized hateful conduct a year ago following the deadly mosque attacks in New Zealand which prompted a "call to action" by governments to curb the spread of online extremism.

Automated systems and artificial intelligence can be useful, Facebook said, for detecting extremist content in various languages and analyzing text embedded in images and videos to understand its full context. Mike Schroepfer, Facebook's chief technology officer, told journalists on a conference call that one of the techniques helping this effort was a system to identify "near identical" images, to address the re-

posting of malicious images and videos with minor changes to evade detection.

"This technology can detect near perfect matches," Schroepfer said. Heather Woods, a Kansas State University professor who studies memes and extremist content, welcomed Facebook's initiative and inclusion of outside researchers. "Memes are notoriously complex, not only because they are multimodal, incorporating both image and text, as Facebook notes, but because they are contextual," Woods said. "I imagine memes' nuance and contextual specificity will remain a challenge for Facebook and other platforms looking to weed out hate speech." — Agencies

Business

THURSDAY, MAY 14, 2020

10 IMF chief says global growth forecast cuts 'very likely'**10** Bitcoin rises after eagerly awaited 'halving'**11** COVID-19 crisis fuels largest US price decline since 2008

A handout picture provided by Energy giant Saudi Aramco, Saudi Arabia's state-owned oil and gas company, shows its Rig SAR 154, in eastern Saudi Arabia. — AFP

Saudi austerity drive squeezes private sector

Promise of future prosperity fades as state spending remains engine of growth

RIYADH/DUBAI: Saudi Arabia's austerity drive will squeeze a private sector vital to its plan to diversify away from oil and the kingdom may see its spending power shrink.

Several businessmen and economists said the tripling of value added tax (VAT) and suspension of a cost of living allowance for state employees could deepen a downturn in the Arab world's largest economy and delay job creation. The changes are set to ripple through most areas of business life, already struggling with weak demand due to a coronavirus lockdown, and weigh on living standards of ordinary Saudis. "I don't understand how this will help the private sector that is already hit by low demand," said a Saudi retailer, who requested anonymity to speak freely.

"People are already holding on to their cash and no one is spending at all." He said if business remains weak by the end of the year "I will have no other way than cutting jobs to minimize the cost".

Authorities had until now avoided steps affecting citizens directly, acutely aware that Saudis' ability to tolerate such measures is vital in a country without

elections and where political legitimacy rests partly on distribution of oil wealth. While many Saudis have rallied around their leaders on social media, others posted pictures of late King Abdullah under the hashtag "livelihood", recalling a time of high oil prices and state largesse.



Low oil prices, virus impact economy

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman shook up the conservative kingdom in 2016 with an ambitious vision to wean the economy off oil income, create a thriving private sector and generate millions of jobs in new industries and mega projects.

"Double shock"

But low oil prices and the coronavirus have battered the finances of the world's largest oil exporter at a time when state spending remains its economic engine and large foreign capital inflows have proven elusive. Unemployment among Saudis stands at 12 percent.

Finance Minister Mohammed Al-Jadaan said the measures, including cuts to state operating and capital expenditure, were "painful but necessary". While Saudi bonds rallied as investors saw the measures as a sign Riyadh was ready to take tough steps to contain the deficit, business owners are bracing for more pain.

"Is this the right time? It is a disaster and now a double shock, the coronavirus impact was severe and now we guarantee business is down for a longer time," said a businessman in the construction sector.

Saudi Arabia's decision was likely based on the fact that the private sector still plays a marginal role, analysts said. "The farce of a strong Saudi private sector is put aside. There may be growth over the longer term, but the state was always going to guide that process," said Karen Young, resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington.

The state encouraged Saudis to buy shares in oil giant Aramco when it went public last year. But since March they have been trading below the IPO price, frustrating many. "We have to support the government of course but I wish they made it (measures) gradual," said Fatima, a 24-year-old Saudi saleswoman.

"It was great to spend some extra money on cinemas, gym and dining and save for concerts, but now one has to be careful where to spend money," she said on activities only recently made available under social reforms in the conservative kingdom.

"The problem is these measures touch citizens ... everyone's salary got cut by 10 percent," said a diplomat.

The economy is expected to shrink 2.3 percent this year versus 0.3 percent growth in 2019, according to the International Monetary Fund. Central bank foreign exchange reserves fell in March at their fastest rate in 20 years as the kingdom recorded a \$9 billion budget deficit in the first quarter. Dubai-based economist Nasser Saidi said any additional revenues from the VAT hike would be negligible and the move will likely sharpen the recession. — Reuters

UK economy shrank record 5.8% in March

LONDON: Britain's economy shrank by a record 5.8 percent in March from February as the coronavirus crisis escalated and the government ordered a shutdown of much of the country to stop the spread of the virus, official data showed yesterday.

In the first three months of the year, gross domestic product contracted by 2.0 percent from the last three months of 2019, the Office for National Statistics said. That was the largest quarter-on-quarter fall since the end of 2008, during the depths of the financial crisis, though slightly smaller than the average 2.5 percent forecast in a Reuters poll of economists. It was also a smaller fall than a 3.8 percent slump in GDP in the euro zone in the January-March period although several countries in the single currency area began their lockdowns before Britain.

Figures for April are likely to show a bigger fall in British economic output than in March because the entire month was spent under lockdown by British companies and consumers. "The speed and scale at which coronavirus has hit the UK econ-



LONDON: London's financial district Canary Wharf is seen as a man exercises in Greenwich Park in South London. Britain's economy shrank by a record 5.8 percent in March from February, official data showed yesterday. — AFP

omy is unprecedented and means that the Q1 decline is likely to be followed by a further, more historically significant, contraction in economic activity in Q2," Suren Thiru, head of economics at the British Chambers of Commerce, said. Last week, the Bank of England said Britain's economy could be heading for its sharpest annual slump in GDP in more than 300 years, saying a 14 percent fall was possible, followed potentially by a 15 percent rise in 2021.

"Given that the economy was growing a quarterly rate of about 0.1 percent before the lockdown, today's release therefore implies that economic activity after the lockdown was imposed on March 23 was down a whopping 21 percent," Ruth Gregory, an economist with Capital Economics, said. The ONS said output in Britain's giant services sector fell by a record 1.9 percent in the first quarter and there were also significant contractions in production and construction. — Reuters

OPEC+ wants oil output cuts beyond June

DUBAI/LONDON/MOSCOW: OPEC and its allies want to maintain existing oil cuts beyond June when the OPEC+ group is next due to meet to shore up prices and demand, which has been hit by the coronavirus pandemic, four OPEC+ sources said on Tuesday. Global oil demand has slumped by about 30% as the crisis has curtailed travel and economic activity, building up oil inventories globally. Brent crude prices fell 65.6 percent in the first quarter, before the OPEC+ grouping agreed its deepest oil cuts.

OPEC and its allies, led by Russia, who are known as OPEC+, agreed in April to cut output by 9.7 million bpd for May and June, a record reduction. While producers will slowly relax curbs after June, supply reductions will remain to April 2022. "The ministers want to keep the same oil production cuts now which are about 10 million bpd, after June. They don't want to reduce the size of the cuts. This is the basic scenario that's being discussed now," one OPEC+ source told Reuters.

OPEC+ meets next in early June to decide on its output policy. Under the deal, the

exporting group is set to scale back the cuts to 7.7 million bpd from July until December. A source familiar with Russia's thinking did not rule out a rollover of the existing oil cuts beyond June, but added that "it will depend on a market situation". "We all look forward to getting back to some normality. It's important that demand picks up again and soon. But demand will be down until the lockdowns are lifted," another OPEC+ source said, in reference to restrictions to contain the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, which has killed tens of thousands. Saudi Arabia made a surprise announcement on Monday that it will voluntarily deepen oil output cuts from June by 1 million barrels per day, saying it wants to expedite draining a global supply glut and rebalancing the oil market.

Gulf OPEC producers the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait have joined Saudi Arabia and pledged fresh cuts for their June output by a combined 180,000 bpd. Oil prices rose on Tuesday, boosted by the unexpected cut announcements by the Gulf producers. The supply reductions, along with the easing of lockdowns in some countries which have helped lift fuel demand, are expected to ease pressure on crude storage capacity and shore up prices. But renewed coronavirus outbreaks in China and South Korea have revived concerns, while Germany has also reported that new coronavirus infections were accelerating exponentially after early steps to ease its lockdown. — Reuters

Business

IMF chief says world growth forecast cuts 'very likely'

Coronavirus hits economies hard than previously projected

WASHINGTON: International Monetary Fund Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said on Tuesday it was "very likely" the Fund would cut global growth forecasts further as the coronavirus pandemic was hitting many economies harder than previously projected.

"Incoming data from many countries is worse than our already pessimistic projections," Georgieva said during a webcast conference sponsored by the Financial Times. "Very likely we are going to come up with the update to our projections sometime in June, and at that point ... our expectation is that there would be a bit more bad news in terms of how we see 2020." The IMF forecast a month ago that business closures and lockdowns to slow the spread of the virus would throw the world into the deepest recession since the 1930s Great Depression, with gross domestic product output shrinking 3 percent in 2020.

Under the IMF's baseline scenario, which called for effects of the pandemic to fade in the second half of the year, it pre-

dicted growth would rebound to 5.8 percent in 2021. But the Fund also said at the time its forecast was precarious and depended on incoming data.

The United States lost 20.5 million jobs in April with the unemployment rate lost at 14.7 percent, and some US officials have

more than \$2.5 trillion in additional financing to grapple with the pandemic.

The IMF's previous estimate of that amount—from both internal country resources and external financing—was "on the lower end," she said. Georgieva expected that number to be revised upward when the IMF released its new global economic forecasts.

A month after the IMF and World Bank Spring Meetings, Georgieva said IMF members still lacked agreement over an issue of new IMF Special Drawing Rights, a step last taken in 2009 that would provide hundreds of billions of dollars in new liquidity for all IMF members, rich and poor. But members would continue to review liquidity needs and IMF resources, she said.

"During our spring meetings, it was very clear the membership said, 'Everything is on the table. Let's see how this crisis evolves in the future.'" Debt sustainability remained a major concern, she said, and countries needed to build more resilient economies to be able to weather



WASHINGTON: International Monetary Fund Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva says it is "very likely" the Fund would cut global growth forecasts further as the coronavirus pandemic was hitting many economies harder than previously projected.

crises in the future. Georgieva said the IMF was "very keen" to support Argentina as it deals with both the coronavirus crisis and its unsustainable debt level.

The IMF chief said she was convinced the current Argentine government was

working earnestly to address the debt problems. "What I see in Argentina is actually a government that wants to do the right thing for its own people, and for its role in the region, (and) in the world economy," Georgieva said. — Reuters



US lost
20.5m jobs
in April

said that May jobs data could be worse.

The IMF typically revises its World Economic Outlook forecasts in early July. Georgieva said the worsening data was also likely to mean that emerging markets and developing economies would need

across Europe over the last 4 years. The impact of the pandemic over the last few months has shown some of the value that communications agencies with their clients and media partners can bring to their communities and I am sure that Paul, Tamara and the team can build on this to ensure EACA plays an even more valuable role in the future.

Says Tamara Daltroff, EACA Director General: "I could not be more delighted that Paul accepted to take on the Presidency role. In this difficult period, Paul is the perfect senior agency leader to guide EACA and the industry with his experience and knowledge. The agency world has been through fundamental changes over the last decade and continues to evolve in these very dynamic times.

On behalf of all EACA members, I also want to thank Dominic for his leadership and outstanding involvement during his tenure. He has played a key role for EACA over the last 4 years."

"It is with great pleasure to take on my new responsibilities as president of the EACA and to continue the great work done by Dominic. Although we are in extremely challenging times, I am confident that with the support and strength of the committee we will be able to achieve many things", states Paul O'Donnell.

Paul has been with Ogilvy for over 30 years. He has worked in Europe, Asia-Pacific and Latin America, running geographic operations and working with major international and local clients. In May 2014, Paul



Paul O'Donnell

was appointed Chief Executive, Ogilvy EMEA. He is a member of the agency's International Executive Management Group and an Executive Partner of the Ogilvy Group Worldwide.

In addition to representing European agencies to the EU Institutions in Brussels, EACA runs the Effie Awards Europe to reward the most effective campaigns in Europe; and the IMC European Awards to recognize the best brand activation efforts in the region. In the last few years, EACA has also created Inspire! by eaca, a hub for education and training opportunities in the commercial communications industry. Its aim is to raise industry standards by providing innovative and customized training solutions to students and young professionals.

BofA report

A trade and tech war comeback?

Tensions over the Coronavirus add to the long list of disputes between the US and China. But major actions against China are unlikely before the election, as US policymakers will be focused on the ailing economy. After the election, a serious decoupling shock is a rising risk, particularly if the economy has recovered.

United States: Don't pick a letter for this cycle

Rather than attempt to mold this cycle to a typical "letter" path, we recommend viewing the trajectory in three phases. Phase 1 is the shutdown, which was painful but over. We are squarely in Phase 2, the transition as the economy finds the bottom. Phase 3 is the recovery which will be one of fits and starts, driven by three variables: path of the virus, degree of offsetting stimulus and residual economic damage.

German debt

We look at German debt trajectories

- if all goes well, Germany could get back to pre-shock debt levels by 2030. An incomplete Euro area recovery could challenge German fiscal discipline. Debt ratios could rise for most of the decade. To increase the chances of complying with national rules in future, a big (Euro area) stimulus may be needed.

China - higher deficit

We expect a significant rise in headline fiscal budget deficit ratio in 2020, to 4.8 percent of GDP from budgeted 2.8 percent in 2019. We forecast augmented fiscal deficit to rise to 15.5 percent in 2020 from 7.8 percent in 2019.?

Emerging EMEA

The finalized government reform plan has launched the process of negotiations on an IMF program. Our main takeaways from the draft reform plan remain valid; we supplement our analysis with some additional observations.

Latin America

Available data suggests early economic hit. Record low confidence and unemployment up. Expect very negative activity data ahead. We revise up our '20 unemployment forecast to 14 percent. Lockdown length key to labor market impact & demand recovery.

Ogilvy's Paul O'Donnell voted EACA president

BRUSSELS/LONDON: Paul O'Donnell, Chief Executive of Ogilvy EMEA has been voted as the new President of the European Association of Communications Agencies (EACA) for a two-year term. He succeeds Dominic Grainger, Chief Executive Officer, WPP Specialist Communications, who has been EACA's head since 2016.

O'Donnell's two-year tenure will be focused on increasing co-operation and collaboration across Europe as the world's largest advertising market responds to the twin challenges of Coronavirus and Brexit. Agencies and national trade bodies need to work together as never before to maintain market access for our services, support employment for our people, and create tangible value for our clients. We will be taking the broadest possible definition of the 'European market', including opportunities in Eastern Europe, Turkey and the continued close engagement with the UK, irrespective of the final terms of Britain's formal departure from the EU.

Dominic Grainger, previous president of the EACA, says: 'It has been an honor and a pleasure to work with such a strong, diverse team of communications leaders from

EU seeks trade truce with US amid crisis

BRUSSELS: The EU's top trade official hopes the economic fallout of the coronavirus pandemic will spur efforts to heal US trade ties, bogged down in a tit-for-tat tariff feud. The commission on Friday will present its new strategy towards the US to trade officials from the 27 member states, some of whom view warily this efforts to make fresh inroads with US President Donald Trump.

EU Trade Commissioner Phil Hogan laid out his strategy in a letter on April 30 to US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer, Trump's point man in carrying out protectionist trade wars with Europe and China. "I believe that the current crisis presents a political opportunity to address these issues, and would be happy to hear if you agree," Hogan said in the letter, seen by AFP.

A European source said Hogan and Lighthizer had held an initial phone conversation on Monday that had gone positively. The European Commission, the EU's executive arm, handles all trade negotiations for the EU 27 and represents the



LONDON: A handout image released by 10 Downing Street, shows Britain's International Trade Secretary Liz Truss (second left) during a video conference call with US trade representative Robert Lighthizer during UK-US trade talks, in the Foreign Office in London. — AFP

member states at the WTO.

EU-US trade relations have deteriorated since Trump came to power more than three years ago on a promise to close his country's yawning trade deficit with the rest of the world. The skirmishes with Europe began when Trump imposed tariffs on steel and aluminium imports from the EU.

Brussels shot back by taxing iconic US products, including denim jeans and motorcycles. Trump has also threatened duties on European cars, which is of particular concern to Germany, but he has so far backed down under the pressure from US lawmakers.

Donald Trump's efforts to reopen the virus-hit American economy, the world's top oil consumer. US benchmark West Texas (WTI) Intermediate for June delivery was down 1.36 percent at \$25.43 a barrel in morning Asian trade.

Global benchmark Brent crude for July was trading 1.4 percent lower at \$29.56 a barrel. Both contracts, which were hammered last month as demand evaporated due to virus lockdowns, had risen Tuesday after Saudi Arabia announced further output cuts. "The road to recovery hit a massive pothole," AxiCorp global market strategist Stephen Innes said, referring to Trump's testimony. "While the market feels more comfortable on the supply side of the

equation, on the demand side, the focus will continue to revolve around the risks of easing lockdowns or even the extensions."

In his first appearance on Capitol Hill in two months, Trump delivered a cautionary message at odds with Trump's push to reopen the economy soon. The respected scientist warned of "serious" consequences if states lifted lockdowns without following safety guidelines developed by federal authorities. "There is a real risk that you will trigger an outbreak that you may not be able to control," he added. Analysts said however that signs the virus-triggered supply glut was easing would continue to provide some support to markets. — AFP

Bitcoin rises after eagerly awaited 'halving'

SINGAPORE: Bitcoin rose yesterday after undergoing an eagerly awaited adjustment that occurs every few years to limit the amount of the virtual currency on the market, building on a recent coronavirus-driven rally. So-called "halving" takes place every four years and is when the reward received by "miners", whose computer processors enable the running of the world's most popular virtual currency, is reduced.

The virtual unit was trading 1.6 percent higher at \$8,897 in Asia, according to digital currency tracker CoinDesk, after the "halving" took place earlier this week. Bitcoin is up about 25 percent this year, with investors viewing it as a hedge against inflation expected to be triggered by central banks easing monetary policy to cushion economies from the virus outbreak.

"The Bitcoin 'halving' in effect makes generating new Bitcoins twice as difficult," Jeffrey Halley, senior market analyst from OANDA, said. "That will be supportive of prices."

Wednesday's rise also tracked a broader shift from stocks into other assets, after a top US scientist warned that ending lockdowns too quickly could trigger uncontrollable new coronavirus outbreak. "Halving" is also expected to hit the profitability of mining bitcoin as more work will be needed to achieve the same reward—but analysts say this could be offset if the unit's value rises. Bitcoin, which is notoriously volatile and reached almost \$20,000 in 2017 before slumping heavily, has no legal exchange rate, no central bank backing it and is traded on specialist platforms. It was created in 2008 by a person or group writing under the pseudonym Satoshi Nakamoto as a peer-to-peer decentralised electronic cash system.

It started as the preserve of computer nerds and financial experts but has gained a following among a broader group seeking alternatives to traditional investments, while it has been used to pay for items from a pint in a London pub to a manicure. — AFP



A visual representation of the digital crypto-currency Bitcoin, at the "Bitcoin Change" shop. So-called "halving" is when bitcoin-mining companies and individuals discover what they will receive in return for their contribution to the system's smooth operation. — AFP

Oil falls as top US scientist warns of risks

SINGAPORE: Oil prices fell yesterday after the US government's top infectious disease expert warned that ending lockdowns in the world's biggest economy too soon could trigger fresh coronavirus outbreaks.

Anthony Fauci's remarks before a US Senate panel put a damper on President

Business

COVID-19 crisis fuels largest US price decline since 2008

Consumer price index falls 0.8% in April

WASHINGTON: US consumer prices dropped by the most since the Great Recession in April, weighed down by a plunge in demand for gasoline and services including airline travel as Americans stayed home during the coronavirus crisis.

The report from the Labor Department on Tuesday also showed a record decrease in underlying prices last month, raising the specter of a bout of deflation as the economy sinks deeper into a recession triggered by lockdowns to slow the spread of COVID-19, the respiratory illness caused by the coronavirus. The government reported last Friday that the economy lost 20.5 million jobs in April, the deepest drop since the Great Depression. The economy contracted in the first quarter at its steepest pace since the 2007-09 downturn. Deflation, a decline in the general price level, is harmful during a recession as consumers and businesses may delay purchases in anticipation of lower prices.

"The economic collapse has taken a dangerous turn where now it is consumer prices that are being pulled down into the abyss as consumers sitting at home have postponed their purchases," said Chris Rupkey, chief economist at MIFG in New York. "Part of the reason the Great Depression lingered so long was because consumers knew they could wait till next year to buy cars and refrigerators and homes at a cheaper discount." The consumer price index tumbled 0.8 percent last month after falling 0.4 percent in March. That was the largest decline since December 2008 when the economy was in the throes of a recession, and marked the second straight monthly decrease in the CPI.

Gasoline prices plunged 20.6 percent, the largest decrease since November 2008, after tumbling 10.5 percent in March. Cheaper gasoline amid a collapse in crude oil prices offset a 1.5 percent surge in the cost of food last month, which was the largest gain since January 1990, after a 0.3 percent rise in March.

Prices for food consumed at home accelerated 2.6 per-

cent, the largest advance since February 1974, amid broad gains in all six major grocery store food groups. There have been shortages of meat amid COVID-19 outbreaks at processing plants. The cost of food consumed at home increased only 0.5 percent in March. In the 12 months through April, the CPI gained 0.3 percent, the smallest annual rise since October 2015, after increasing 1.5 percent in March. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast the CPI falling 0.8 percent in April and rising 0.4 percent year-on-year. The dollar fell against a basket of currencies, while US Treasury prices rose. Stocks on Wall Street were mixed.

Strong healthcare costs

The Labor Department said in-store data collection has been suspended since March 16 because of the public health crisis. It added that data collection last month was also impacted "by the temporary closing or limited operations of certain types of establishments," leading to "an increase in the number of prices being considered temporarily unavailable and imputed."

That resulted in many indexes being based on smaller amounts of collected prices than usual, and a small number of indexes that are normally published were not published in April. Excluding the volatile food and energy components, the CPI dropped 0.4 percent in April, the largest decline since the series started in 1957. The so-called core CPI dipped 0.1 percent in March, which was the first drop since January 2010. April marked the first back-to-back fall in the core CPI since 1982.

Underlying inflation was depressed in April by a record 8.1 percent plunge in the cost of hotel and motel accommodation. It was also cheaper to fly last month, with the cost of airline fares tumbling a record 15.2 percent after decreasing 12.6 percent in March. Apparel dropped a record 4.7 percent last month after declining 2.0 percent in March. Economists expect the broad deflationary trend



WASHINGTON, DC: White House Economic Council Director Larry Kudlow talks to reporters wearing face masks outside the White House on the morning that the Labor Department announced that more than 20 million people lost their jobs in April due to the novel coronavirus pandemic in Washington, DC. —AFP

to give way to higher inflation at least next year partly because of extraordinary measures by the Federal Reserve to cushion the economy's fall, including programs to help keep companies afloat. A historic fiscal package of around \$3 trillion and rebounding oil prices as producers cut output are also factors. Lingering disruptions to the supply chain could see some goods remain in short supply, boosting prices, though that could be tempered by cheaper hotel and air travel. "This is not to suggest that we see runaway inflation coming down the road, we do not, but the market's pricing of inflation at effectively zero is unrealistic and excessively pessimistic," said Rick Rieder, chief investment officer of global fixed income at BlackRock in New York.

In the 12 months through April, the core CPI rose 1.4

percent, the smallest increase since April 2011, after advancing 2.1 percent in March. The Fed tracks the core personal consumption expenditures (PCE) price index for its 2 percent inflation target. The core PCE price index increased 1.7 percent year-on-year in March after rising 1.8 percent in February. April's core PCE price index data will be released at the end of the month. Owners' equivalent rent of primary residence, which is what a homeowner would pay to rent or receive from renting a home, gained 0.2 percent after increasing 0.3 percent in March. Rent increases slowed last month, likely reflecting forbearance agreements between landlords and tenants who have lost their jobs or have had their hours reduced because of the global pandemic. —Reuters



Core CPI drops 0.4% year-on-year

Electric car sales jump in Europe

FRANKFURT: Registrations of electric cars in Europe jumped 57.4 percent in the first quarter of 2020, but still only accounted for 4.3 percent of total registrations, auto industry data showed on Tuesday, as carmakers struggle to meet tough new anti-pollution rules.

Overall sales of passenger cars in the European Union, United Kingdom and countries of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) fell by 52.9 percent in the same period, when many showrooms were closed due to lockdowns to contain the coronavirus pandemic, the ACEA auto association said.

With economies facing deep recessions and consumer confidence plunging, analysts fear it could get harder to persuade drivers to embrace change. Of the 3,054,703 new cars registered in the first three months of the year, 52 percent were petrol powered and 28 percent were diesel, the ACEA data showed.

In Germany, Europe's largest car market, showrooms have been open since late April, but demand is massively down and inventory levels unusually high in what is usually the strongest sales period, German dealership association ZDK said.

Demand is down by at least 50 percent from a year earlier, according to more than half of the 1,357 dealers polled by ZDK. Shifting more electric cars will be made harder by the backlog of unsold combustion-engined vehicles.

"There are between 750,000 to 1 million unsold cars sitting in German dealerships, the vast majority of them are conventional petrol and diesel cars," ZDK spokesman Ulrich Koester said. Electric car sales in the EU, UK and EFTA countries reached 130,297 in January-March, ACEA said.

Germany extended its lead over Norway in terms of new electric car registrations, with a 63.3 percent rise. Sales in France jumped 145.6 percent, while Norway's declined 12.4 percent. Carmakers need to sell more electric vehicles after EU lawmakers in December 2018 ordered them to cut carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions by 40 percent between 2007 and 2021, and then by a further of 37.5 percent by 2030, or face fines.

Average emissions from new cars should not exceed 95 grams of CO2 per kilometer by 2021. In 2018, the latest year for which statistics are available, the total was 120.4 grams per kilometer, according to the European Environment Agency. Analysts at PA Consulting have forecast that, based on 2018 fleet average emission levels, manufacturers would need to sell more than 2.5 million extra electric cars, or a sales increase of 1,280 percent by 2021.

Carmakers are readying new electric and hybrid models to try to meet the targets. Volkswagen Group said in March 2019 it planned to launch almost 70 new electric models by 2028, starting with its ID3 model which is set to hit showrooms in summer. —Reuters

Trump wants California to let Tesla reopen

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump on Tuesday urged that Tesla Inc be allowed to reopen its electric vehicle assembly plant in California, joining the carmaker's CEO Elon Musk's bid to defy county officials that have ordered it to remain closed.

"California should let Tesla & @elonmusk open the plant, NOW. It can be done Fast & Safely!" Trump wrote on Twitter. On Monday, Tesla Chief Executive Elon Musk said production was resuming at the automaker's sole US vehicle factory, defying an order to stay closed and saying if anyone had to be arrested, it should be him. Tesla shares were up 2 percent at \$827.30 in afternoon trading. Musk tweeted "Thank you!" in response to Trump on Tuesday.

The company, which on Saturday sued Alameda County over its decision that the plant should stay closed, did not immediately comment on Trump's tweet.

Trump is eager for the US economy to reopen and for Americans to return to work. He has sparred with California for years over a series of

issues, including immigration, vehicle fuel-efficiency standards, funding for high-speed rail and numerous environmental issues. Trump has met with Musk on several occasions during his presidency. California Governor Gavin Newsom on Monday said he had spoken with Musk several days ago and that the Tesla founder's concerns helped prompt the state to begin its phased reopening of manufacturing last week.

Late on Monday, health officials in Alameda County said they were aware Tesla had opened beyond the so-called minimum basic operations allowed during lockdown, and had notified the company it could not operate without a county-approved plan. In January, Trump told CNBC that Musk is "one of our great geniuses, and we have to protect our genius."

States and cities around the United States are experimenting with ways to safely reopen their economies after the coronavirus outbreak shuttered businesses and forced tens of millions of Americans out of work. Around the country, major automakers are beginning to reopen plants, with Detroit's Big Three automakers set to reopen most US plants next week.

Robert Reich, who served as US labor secretary under President Bill Clinton, criticized Musk on Twitter Tuesday, saying: "Billionaires who think they're above the law and risk

Multinationals in the time of coronavirus

MILAN: The coronavirus pandemic, set to provoke a severe global recession this year, is hitting multinational companies disproportionately.

Here is a list of winners and losers, according to a study published on Tuesday from the research unit of Italian bank Mediobanca, based on results from the first quarter of 2020.

THE WINNERS

Internet

Global internet companies are the top performers, managing to maintain their momentum even during the worst of the coronavirus crisis. Revenue for the sector jumped by 17.4 percent, with net profit rising 14.9 percent. "It's a sector that has always grown much faster than the others and it has maintained this speed," commented the Mediobanca research centre.

During the epidemic, growth has been driven by cloud services (+27.4 percent) as they benefited from increased teleworking, new subscrip-

tions (+26.5 percent) and e-commerce (+22.8 percent). Conversely, online travel sales were hit hard during the quarter.

As a sign of their robust health, which is expected to continue, most companies in the sector confirmed the payment of dividends to shareholders or even increased them, with an average boost of 11 percent.

Large-scale distribution

The pandemic has led to "unprecedented growth in demand from the mass retail sector," wrote the Mediobanca research center, although what is in consumers' shopping baskets has changed. Food, health and hygiene products (think hand sanitiser) have increased while products deemed less essential have fallen. On average, the sector's sales grew by 9.1 percent with European online food sales growing 40 percent. Net profit rose 34.8 percent. Experts expect this growth to slow in the second quarter due to inventories built up when the epidemic broke out.

Pharmaceuticals

Higher sales of antivirals and respiratory drugs drove growth in the sector, which partially offset lower demand for other drugs due to fewer surgeries



BEIJING: People looking at a Tesla car on display at a showroom in Beijing. Auto sales in China, which experienced a record low due to the coronavirus outbreak, are recovering as some Chinese seek an alternative to public transportation, but the upturn remains fragile. —AFP

the lives of workers shouldn't get away with it. Tell @elonmusk to close his factory until health experts say it's safe."

Musk, over the weekend, threatened to leave California for Texas or Nevada over his factory's closure. His move has highlighted the competition for jobs and ignited a rush to woo the billionaire executive by states that have reopened their economies more quickly in response to encouragement from Trump.

Tesla also has a vehicle plant in

Shanghai and is building another in Berlin. Its lawsuit on Saturday alleged that Alameda County, where the plant is located, had violated California's constitution by defying Newsom's orders allowing manufacturers to reopen. Newsom's office did not immediately comment on Tuesday.

In the past, Musk has discussed opening a second US factory outside California. In a tweet in February, he solicited comments on potentially opening a factory in Texas. —Reuters

and medical consultations unrelated to Covid-19. The segment's sales grew by 6.1 percent, while net income jumped 20.5 percent. The outlook is "positive", even if inventories could be a brake on growth, the study found.

Other winners

Another performer was the electronics sector, up 4.5 percent, driven by an increase of more than 20 percent in sales of semiconductors and microprocessors. Despite a drop in money transfers and less travel, electronic payments rose 4.7 percent. Nevertheless, the sector's net profit fell by 17 percent.

THE LOSERS

Oil and energy

The biggest loser in the pandemic: the oil and energy sector, which saw its sales fall by 15.9 percent, suffering net losses due to the collapse of crude oil prices. Multinationals, which have decided to reduce investments by an average of 25 percent as a result of the crisis, are expecting a very difficult year, with a drop in sales of around 30 to 40 percent, Mediobanca estimated.

Fashion

Always a "solid" segment, fashion was deemed non-essential during the

coronavirus emergency. Moreover, most shops selling clothing were closed during lockdowns. Revenue slid by 14.1 percent during the quarter despite a robust 25 percent rise in online sales. Net profit fell by 92 percent.

Certain categories suffered the most, such as jewellery, while the sale of eyeglasses performed better.

Transportation

The pandemic has brought the sector to a halt. The automobile industry has seen its sales fall by 9.1 percent and its net profit by 92.4 percent. For aircraft manufacturers, the pandemic is synonymous with net losses and a 22.1 percent drop in revenue. Most companies in the sector, which faces a "difficult" future, have cancelled or reduced dividends, while reducing investments and R&D spending.

Telecoms

While telecom revenues declined by only 2.6 percent, net profit fell 20.4 percent, mainly due to unfavourable exchange rates. "Although traffic volume increased (...) it did not lead to an increase in turnover because these companies often offer packages," said the study center, while raising the possibility of a recovery. —Reuters

Health & Science

China smog returns as factories reopen

BEIJING: The coronavirus pandemic had cleared smog from China's skies for months, but air pollution has returned with a vengeance as factories rush to ramp up output after going idle during the outbreak.

Levels of toxic pollutants including nitrogen dioxide and tiny particles known as PM2.5 were all higher in April compared with the same period last year, data released by Greenpeace China on Friday showed.

"What is interesting is how rapidly the emissions have rebounded after the sharp fall seen in the first three months of the year," Li Shuo, a climate and energy expert at Greenpeace China said. "This may be an early sign that the positive trends seen during the epidemic period might be quickly reversed."

Levels of PM2.5 across China fell by more than 18 percent between January 20 and April 4 amid city-wide lockdowns and strict travel restrictions, according to the environment ministry. Satellite images released earlier by NASA and the European Space Agency showed that nitrogen dioxide emissions in major Chinese cities in central and east China—where most chemical, steel and cement plants are located—were down by 30 percent in the first two months of the year.

But the level of PM2.5 particles in a cubic metre of air in April was 33.93, a slight increase from 33.2 in the same period last year. The level of nitrogen dioxide in a cubic metre of air in April was 25.4 compared with 24.6 in the same month last year.

Both pollutants are toxic by-products of burning coal, oil and gas and can cause asthma, heart diseases and can

even weaken the immune system, making people more susceptible to contracting other illnesses.

Exposure to chronic air pollution has shortened China's average life expectancy by more than four years, according to the World Health Organization.

An uptick in industrial production and adverse weather patterns have worsened air pollution in April, Li said. Electricity production was up 1.2 percent in April. China relies on coal for most of its energy, he said.

Illegal emissions

Local governments were also turning a blind eye towards factories flouting emissions standards as they rushed to increase production. The environment ministry said Friday that local officials in the coastal province of Fujian—a textile and electronics equipment manufacturing hub—have failed to take "strict and correct" measures to curb illegal emissions and even accepted bribes from companies.

Some heavy polluters have also been faking emissions data submitted to the government's online monitoring system over the last two months, the ministry said in a separate statement Friday. In March, a packaging materials company in Shandong province was fined one million yuan (\$141,000) for emitting 12 times more sulfur dioxide than what was earlier reported.

A company in the eastern city of Wenzhou that was helping the local government collect online emissions data had "tampered with the figures more than 100 times between March 24 and April 9", the ministry said.



BEIJING: An uptick in industrial production and adverse weather patterns have worsened air pollution in April. Electricity production was up 1.2 percent in April. — Reuters

Polluting stimulus

Environmentalists are worried that a stimulus to kick-start the ailing economy, which shrank 6.8 percent in the first quarter, would worsen air pollution woes. After the 2008 financial crisis, Beijing launched a four trillion yuan (\$567.6 billion) stimulus package that included massive infrastructure investment.

In the years that followed, air pollution rose to record highs and sparked a public backlash. China has refrained from an all-out stimulus this time around, and has pushed for investments in high-tech sectors such as 5G telecom networks, smart manufacturing, data centers and electric vehicles. But in early March, Chinese regulators approved

7.9 gigawatts of new coal-fired power plants—more than the approved projects in the entire year of 2019, Li said.

"Depending on how the economic situation unfolds, the government may still retrieve its old playbook and invest in traditional infrastructure projects that took a toll on the environment," Li said. — AFP

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Lifestyle | Features



Fashion designer Yr Johannsdottir poses for a photo wearing one of her masks at her studio in Reykjavik, Iceland.—AFP photos



Fashion designer Yr Johannsdottir poses for a photo wearing one of her masks.



Fashion designer Yr Johannsdottir shows one of her masks at her studio.



Fashion designer Yr Johannsdottir shows one of her masks.

Icelandic designer makes 'scary' masks to encourage distancing



Fashion designer Yr Johannsdottir works on one of her masks.

Throughout the coronavirus pandemic the effectiveness of masks has been under debate, but Icelandic designer Yrurari's knitted face coverings aren't so much to stop airborne droplets as to keep people at a distance by displaying scary tongues or fangs. The sometimes bizarre creations were inspired by the films and TV shows Yr Johannsdottir, the designer's real name, watched during a self-imposed confinement in March and April. "The idea is that the masks would be 'scary' because of the rule of keeping the distance," Johannsdottir told AFP. "It was a kind of joke approach... the fabric is not safe or anything, but it would keep people away," the 27-year-old designer added.

In the small studio she rents in an industrial area of Reykjavik, balls of yarn are piled up on a shelf next to a desk where a dozen of creations, which are knitted to look like grotesque tongues, fangs and less than flattering dental braces. The most elaborate creations require up to ten hours of work to complete. Putting tongues and mouths on masks is a logical continuation of a line of sweaters she produced two years earlier, which represented "confusing feelings that come with life," and included a sweater adorned with tongues that represented "love or lust." Like most Icelandic children, Johannsdottir was taught how to knit in school at the age of nine. "I got strangely obsessed with knitting... I was always read-

ing Donald Duck comics and knitting at the same time," she said.

While her masks have enjoyed popularity on social media networks, the young Icelandic designer has no intention of mass producing them. "I don't want to make too many either, I want them to just be like they are for the moment I made them." Textile museums in the United States and the Netherlands have however already expressed interest in adding these masks to their collections as a reminder of these unusual times.—AFP

CUT OFF BY VIRUS, MOSTAR'S TOURISM SEASON FACES COLLAPSE

Without a single tourist clambering across its stone arc, Mostar's majestic bridge would be a picture of tranquility if not for the desperation of Bosnian locals whose tourism season has been wiped out by the coronavirus pandemic. One of the prized jewels of the Balkans, Mostar welcomed one million visitors last year to its enchanting Old Town, whose two halves are connected by the Ottoman-era bridge that peaks above the emerald Neretva River. With more than 90 percent of those tourists foreigners, the town is now facing a particularly painful collapse as the pandemic shuts international borders and severely curbs air travel, sending the global tourism industry into a tailspin.

A few months ago, the Almira hotel, which sits just across from the iconic bridge, was already fully booked for the season thanks to tour groups of between 30 and 50 people who reserved spots each night. Today however, all that has changed. "Cancellation, cancellation, cancellation," said the 61-year-old owner, Almira Grcic, looking at her computer screen in the hotel's reception. Behind her, the keys to the hotel's 21 rooms are stored in their lockers on a shelf.

'Season is lost'

Bosnia has so far been spared the worst of COVID-19, which has claimed around 100 lives in this country of 3.5 million. But the economic effect is already being heavily felt in travel destinations such as Mostar, a UNESCO heritage site whose population of 100,000 is sustained by its tourism profits. The dearth of visitors is a sharp reversal from a tourism stream that had been growing steadily ever since the town's Old Bridge was repaired in 2004 after it was destroyed during Bosnia's 1990s war. Today, most of the souvenir shops are padlocked shut while restaurants are closed under lockdown rules.

"Under normal circumstances, customers would wait in front and fight for a table, the streets would be teeming with people," said Haris Kolicic, the 25-year-old manager of the Urban Grill restaurant, whose terrace looks out on the bridge. "If you really look at it, this season is lost," he said. The best the town could hope for was a pick-up towards the end of the year, he added.

Waiting for help

Even when the restrictions are relaxed, the economic "disaster" will continue, said

Haris Djonko, the 29-year-old director of Mostar's Bosnaseum, a history museum closed since March. "The wallets of the visitors who were supposed to come this year are also seriously damaged," he said. "They will have to get back on their own feet economically before travelling." Locals said that state aid had yet to arrive from a government whose labyrinthian bureaucracy inspires little faith. "The state doesn't even know what tourism is," said hotel owner Grcic. She had received "no help" so far but was still hoping to get minimum wage payments for her employees, she added. It seems that only Djenad Bakamovic, a 62-year-old painter, is feeling optimistic. He recently opened his gallery after two months of confinement. "I started again, to draw and to please my soul," he told AFP while laying brush strokes on a watercolour painting of the bridge. "We're here and we're waiting for visitors. We wish them to come and see us in good health."—AFP



The deserted "Old Bridge" of Mostar, usually riddled with groups of tourists is seen from an empty restaurant terrace.—AFP



View of the deserted "Old Bridge" of Mostar, usually riddled with groups of tourists.

Broadway to stay closed until at least September

New York's beloved Broadway theaters will not reopen until at least early September, its trade association announced Tuesday. While the Broadway League did not set a date for performances to resume, they said refunds and ticket exchanges now are offered for performances through September 6. The decision is not particularly surprising given that New York remains the US epicenter of the coronavirus pandemic, with COVID-19 continuing to kill more than 150 people a day in the state. Reopening the arts and entertainment sectors, a major feature of life in New York, is in the final phase of Governor Andrew Cuomo's four-part plan to return economic and cultural activity to the state. "While all Broadway shows would love to resume performances as soon as possible, we need to ensure the health and well-being of everyone who comes to the theater — behind the curtain and in front of it — before shows can return," said Charlotte St. Martin, the Broadway League's president, in a statement.—AFP

France's 'little museums' looking to shine as lockdown eases

Often overlooked by tourists flocking to the Louvre, the Centre Pompidou and other superstar museums, France's more intimate galleries and cultural sites are preparing to open their doors as the coronavirus lockdown is progressively lifted. Unlike their huge rivals that attract throngs of visitors every day and are expected to remain shuttered for weeks if not months, smaller museums can more easily implement the new normal of virus-curbing social distancing measures. "Little museums," as Culture Minister Franck Riester called them this month, will be allowed to open from this week if directors secure approval from municipal authorities.

They will have to prove that visitor flows can be managed, perhaps with staggered entrances or limited ticket sales. A handful have already sought permission to reopen, hoping to attract locals starving for a culture fix after two months of strict stay-at-home orders — residents are still required to stay within 100 kilometers (60 miles) of home to minimize COVID-19 contagion risks. They include the Manoir de Kerazan in Brittany, one of the best-preserved feudal estates of western France, and the Musée de l'Image in Epinal in eastern France, which celebrates traditionalist prints popular

since the 18th century. The Ingres-Bourdelle collection of classic paintings in Montauban, southern France, will allow access on weekends starting May 16, and the museum in Rodez for Pierre Soulages — one of France's most celebrated living artists — will open May 21.



This file photo a general view of The Ingres-Bourdelle Museum in Montauban, southern France.—AFP

Welcoming the public will also be easier at open-air sites such as the Domaine de Chaumont-sur-Loire in central France, which plans to hold its International Garden Festival this month. But no decision has yet been made on reopening the hugely popular home and gardens of Claude Monet in Giverny, northwest of Paris.

National monuments and museums like the Eiffel Tower or Musée d'Orsay remain closed until further notice, and the government has extended its health state of emergency until July 10 as it tries to combat the crisis. But over a dozen smaller museums in Paris overseen by the city are aiming to open entirely or at least for some exhibits by mid-June, said Delphine Levy, the head of Paris-Musees. "We're focusing on the museums where shows were already under way or almost ready," Levy told AFP, adding that officials had taken advantage of the lockdown since mid-March to carry out minor repairs and renovations. She estimated the 14 museums and sites her agency runs in Paris, including the Catacombs, the Carnavalet history museum and the home of the revered writer Balzac, had suffered 12 million euros (\$13 million) of lost ticket sales and other revenue during the closures.—AFP



Pictured in this screengrab: Tina Fey performs on Byron Allens Feeding America Comedy Festival, co-produced by Entertainment Studios and Funny or Die, broadcasted on NBC, The Weather Channel, Comedy.TV and Local Now.

Star-studded telethon raises \$115 mn for virus-hit New Yorkers

A celebrity virtual telethon organized to help New York charities assisting those hit by the coronavirus pandemic on Monday raised \$115 million in pledges. The hour-long "Rise Up New York!" event was presented by actress Tina Fey, who was emotional as she unveiled the figure at the end of the program. "\$115 million, what a great day for New York!", a tearful Fey said. "Thank you to everyone who gave and gave and gave from all over the world. There's so much more to do." All of the donations will go to the Robin Hood association, which works with more than 250 associations to fight hunger and help the poorest to find accommodation or employment.

Since the start of coronavirus lockdown, 831,000 New Yorkers have registered as unemployed, nearly 10 percent of the population. The amount could rise further as Robin Hood's web site was still accepting pledges. Stars including Mariah Carey, Bon Jovi, Sting and Billy Joel performed from home for the virtual telethon, organized with media group iHeartRadio and broadcast on several national and local television and radio stations. "I know we're strong enough to get through this," Carey said. "We will rise again. We can do this together." The five-time Grammy winner then performed a medley of her hits "Through the Rain" and "Make it Happen," sup-



In this file photo US singer Mariah Carey participates in the ceremonial lighting of the Empire State Building.—AFP

ported by three backup singers joining her from their homes. Jon Bon Jovi performed a slow acoustic version of his classic rock anthem "It's My Life" with the rest of the band joining him remotely.

"Piano Man" Joel adapted his "Miami 2017 (Seen the Lights Go Out on Broadway)" as the Empire State Building changed colors in sync with the music. Joel has performed the 1976 song, which paints a grim picture of a post-apocalyptic New York which has collapsed, at a 9/11 benefit and for victims of Hurricane Sandy in 2012. "Stay Strong New York and wear a mask," Joel concluded.—AFP



Joumana, a 5-year-old African lioness, sits with an assistant of Ahsraf El-Helw, a big cat trainer, at Ahsraf's home in the Egyptian capital Cairo.—AFP photos



Ahsraf El-Helw, feeds Joumana, a 5-year-old African lioness.



Ahsraf El-Helw, a big cat trainer, poses with Joumana, a 5-year-old African lioness, at his home.

LION TAMERS LIVE-STREAM SHOWS FROM CAIRO LIVING ROOM

In his Cairo living room, Egyptian Ahsraf Al-Helw reprimanded his lioness Joumana for not obeying him after bringing her home for live-streamed performances during the coronavirus pandemic. "I am very unhappy with you Jojo," the 26-year-old

ment facilities, including the circus, in a bid to contain the outbreak — forcing the famous Helw family of big cat trainers into a rethink.

Ahsraf has decided to bring the lioness home for a few hours twice a week. Thousands of viewers confined to their homes watched Joumana's first online show last month on Instagram and Facebook. The family now hopes to use the videos to claw back lost revenue to cover their 30 assistants' salaries and feed their 40 lions and tigers. "Business has always gone well in Egypt, especially as people here love the circus," said Ahsraf. "But everything has come to a halt since the coronavirus."

No swipes from neighbors

Ahsraf is a third-generation lion tamer and says his grandmother Mahasen was wildly popular — known as "the iron lady" for being the first Arab and Middle Eastern woman to tame big cats. In 1978, his grandfather Mohamed al-Helw was mauled to death by a lion during a live show. But this did not dissuade his descendants from continuing the family business. Three of Ahsraf's sisters and one brother are also big cat trainers. "This is the first time that I have brought a big lion home," said Ahsraf, who normally only brings cubs back to his pad.

"I only brought Joumana here to entertain people."

Currently Ahsraf brings Joumana home twice a week for training, transporting her in a metal cage in the back of an SUV. The rest of the time she lives in a park outside Cairo. Upon her arrival, the family and assistants block the staircase as the lioness is led into the elevator. "The neighbors never had problems with us, they trust us," said Ahsraf. Hussein Suleiman, the building's security chief, said there had been "no complaints" from the neighbors. "The family is lovely and people like to take photos when they see the lioness passing by." After videos of Joumana performing at home went viral, some on social media voiced fears over possible animal mistreatment.

But Ahsraf, who first publicly performed with lions at the age of 15, dismissed such charges as "false". Meanwhile, even younger members of the Helw family are planning to one day crack the whip. "I will start training (with lions) as soon as I finish my studies," said 20-year-old Karim, a business school student and the youngest of Ahsraf's brothers.—AFP



Ahsraf El-Helw, drives with Joumana, a 5-year-old African lioness, to his home.

lion tamer yelled at the lioness, who returned to her stool before snatching a piece of raw meat from a nearby table. Since March, Cairo has closed entertain-



Ahsraf El-Helw, poses with Joumana, a 5-year-old African lioness.



Ahsraf El-Helw, rides the elevator with Joumana, a 5-year-old African lioness.



Ahsraf El-Helw, performs with Joumana, a 5-year-old African lioness, at his home.



Ahsraf El-Helw, feeds Joumana, a 5-year-old African lioness.



Ahsraf El-Helw poses with Joumana, a 5-year-old African lioness.

La, not le: French Academy says COVID is feminine

French, every noun has a gender, and that includes the disease caused by the novel coronavirus. COVID-19 is feminine — to be used with the article "la" not "le" — according to the official guardian of the French language, which has urged an end to the widespread practice in France of referring to it as masculine. "The use of the feminine would be preferable," the Academie Francaise said in a directive published on its website under the category "faulty use". "It is perhaps not too late to give this acronym back the gender it should have." The academy deplored the use of the masculine "le COVID-19" in the media and general conversation in France, saying the disease had wrongly been attributed the same gender as the germ that causes it: "le" coronavirus.

It explained that COVID was an acronym for coronavirus disease, and that in French, the core word in an acronym is what gives it its gender. In this case, disease, which is a feminine "la maladie" in the language of Moliere. The World Health Organization has long referred to COVID-19 as "la", and in Canada, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, government websites and the media use the feminine form. The "Office quebecois de la langue francaise" also recommends its feminine use, and the Royal Spanish Academy has issued similar guidance, citing the same grammar rationale. The members of the French academy are mostly elderly men who wear an ornate uniform and a sword and are known as the immortals. Only last year did the notoriously conservative academy open the door to feminine versions of professions such as doctor and teacher.—AFP

Transfer of sphinxes to Cairo square stirs controversy

In a bustling square of Egypt's capital, four sphinx-like statues stand in wooden crates ahead of a planned unveiling ceremony following their controversial transfer from historical sites. With the bodies of lions and heads of rams, the statues had for millennia graced Karnak temple in the southern city of Luxor representing the ancient Egyptian god "Amun". This month, the restored sandstone statues were moved to Cairo's landmark Tahrir Square, the epicentre of a 2011 popular uprising that toppled longtime ruler Hosni Mubarak. "I am against the moving of Luxor monuments. I was especially saddened by their relocation," legislator Ahmed Idris from the city told AFP.

"Luxor has long been like an open museum which should be developed and its monuments' historical value are tied to the city," said Idris. The statues will be the square's centrepieces, along with a 19-metre-tall (60-foot-tall) pink granite obelisk of the famed Ramses II. The 3,000-year-old obelisk — of Ramses II facing an ancient deity as well as inscriptions of his titles — was moved from a



An undated handout picture provided by Egypt's Ministry of Antiquities shows a worker setting one of four restored ram-headed sphinxes, symbolizing the ancient Egyptian god Amun.—AFP photos

Nile Delta archaeological site. The relocations which came as part of government plans to renovate Tahrir Square have drawn wide criticism from archaeologists and activists. Some petitioned President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi to stop the transfer. Others including lawyers from a rights group filed a lawsuit citing a 1964 Venice Charter on the conservation and restoration of monuments, saying the move could "jeopardise the priceless artefacts". Egypt signed the charter, adopted by UNESCO, in 1974.

'A touch of civilization'

A frenetically busy square, Tahrir in downtown Cairo has long been associated with blaring car horns, traffic jams and exhaust fumes. It stands a short stroll away from the Egyptian Museum, a tourist magnet which holds a vast collection of precious relics. A staging ground for major protests in Egypt, the square has undergone multiple phases of renovation since the 2011 uprising. Its renovation plan includes unifying building facades, removing street advertisements and an overhaul of its lighting. In December, Sisi said the transfer of artefacts would add "a touch of civilization" to the site. But fears have grown over possible damage to the monuments.

"The high pollution in Tahrir Square will ruin the antiquities and accelerate their deterioration," Egyptologist Monica Hanna said in a Facebook post in December. "A monument's value is diminished when removed from its original historical context and becomes an ornament rather than a monument," she said. Egyptian architect Ayman Badr has said the square does not need "to be adorned with historical elements" as it "already holds historical value".

'A great honor'

Antiquities and Tourism Minister Khaled Al-Anani has dismissed warnings that the monuments could be vandalized or be affected by pollution. Ancient relics in Egyptian



museums or public spaces often suffer damage by graffiti, engravings or just being frequently touched. "No-one will be able to touch them. They will be placed on a high pedestal and surrounded by a water fountain," Anani told a private television channel in March. He said they would undergo regular restoration and maintenance.

The statues were not among those lined up on the famed Khabash (rams) avenue linking Karnak and Luxor temples, according to the minister. Mahmoud Zaki, a tour guide from Luxor, also sided with those defending the transfers. "We exhibit artefacts abroad for foreigners to enjoy... and now it's a great honor that antiquities from Karnak temple adorn Egypt's most popular square," he told AFP.

An unveiling ceremony is planned but an official date has yet to be announced. "It's nonsensical that (Egyptian) obelisks could be found in public spaces across the world and none of them stands in Egypt's most popular square," said antiquities expert Ali Abu Deshish.—AFP

In this file photo tourists take the avenue of the ram-headed sphinxes, symbolizing the ancient Egyptian god Amun, as they visit the Karnak Temple Complex (background) in Egypt's southern city of Luxor.

German 3D printing buffs pitch in with virus-fighting network

DARMSTADT, Germany: The high-ceilinged workshop in Darmstadt is usually open to anyone – from hobbyists trying new machinery or techniques to high-tech startup workers tinkering with prototypes. During the coronavirus pandemic, it has been turned into a hub for dropping off plastic parts made at home by volunteers and used to assemble face shields they are sending to health workers across Germany and even as far off as a refugee camp in Greece.

The so-called German MakerVsVirus network – extending into Austria and Switzerland thanks to the shared language – gathers about 7,000 enthusiasts who are using their own 3D printers or other gadgets to produce much-coveted medical gear. With medical workers worldwide scrambling for protective shields, masks or gowns amid a huge shortage because of the coronavirus, the tech geeks have stepped in to help fill the gap.

Physicist Nico Neumann, who has converted the drop-in workshop into the MakerVsVirus hub, said: "For me, it started with five face shields for my uncle's medical practice. Then my grandfather's care service wanted some, and then we noticed that there was this network in Germany which was ready to be mobilized. We started out as a lot of private individuals and lone wolves who wanted to help."

By late April, Neumann and his team had delivered around 1,600 shields to users in the region. The figure

is even more staggering if the contributions from all 180 MakerVsVirus hubs across Germany are taken into account – some 100,000 face shields have been sent out in the last weeks.

Offloading dozens of plastic parts fresh from the 3D printers at his firm outside the city, Stefan Herzog said: "This situation is really overwhelming for everyone. It's a nice feeling being able to help, even if my contribution is relatively small." The parts were laid out on tables at the entrance of the workshop bearing neatly printed labels for new and fulfilled order documents, freshly delivered plastic parts and assembled face shields ready for delivery.

Each face shield comprises a flexible transparent sheet, anchored at top with a 3D-printed plastic part and secured around the head with an elasticated band. Another 3D-printed plastic part at the bottom helps the mask keep its shape. Although some home-made components turn out fragile or misshapen, those up to standard are sturdy enough to withstand disinfection and repeated use.

Beyond helping medical and other institutions, a shipment of face shields has even reached the notoriously overcrowded and vulnerable refugee camp on the Greek island of Lesbos. The online organization brought together "all these different characters" who are adept at finding technical solutions to create much-needed equipment, said Neumann. He himself



DARMSTADT, Germany: Nico Neumann and Adrian Haakh, members of the "MakerVsVirus" network, pose with face shields built with 3D-printed parts at the Makerspace workshop on April 28, 2020. — AFP

has to organize his voluntary work around a full-time job developing optics. "I'm not getting much sleep or having much of a weekend," Neumann said.

With more professional firms increasingly stepping in to fill large orders for face shields, the former hobbyists are now tackling small batches and more specialist items. New offerings include an adaptor to fit dispensers from one disinfectant brand onto contain-

ers from another as hospitals use whatever supplies they can find. Another is a plastic hook to relieve the strain on sore ears from wearing facemasks all day. "In this environment where it's almost in our spare time, we can respond more flexibly than if you had to convert a whole company's production," Neumann said. "These are things where we can help quickly with our 3D printers." — AFP

Senegal students fighting virus with inventions

DAKAR: Senegalese engineering students are throwing themselves at the West African state's growing coronavirus problem with inventions such as automatic sanitizer dispensers and medical robots. Youngsters from a top engineering school in the capital Dakar have turned their technical skills toward easing pressure on the wards – and they are already in talks with hospitals over some of their innovations.

One example is a small robot, dubbed 'Dr Car', which will be able to measure patients' blood pressure and temperature, according to students from Dakar's Ecole Supérieure Polytechnique (ESP). The university is con-

sidered one of West Africa's best for engineering and technology, and is highly selective, with 28 nationalities represented among its 4,000 students.

Lamine Mouhamed Kebe, one of the students who conceived the robot, said the machine would reduce the exposure of doctors and nurses to infected patients and use of expensive protective gear. "At a certain point ... we realized that medical equipment was limited," the 23-year-old added. "We can do something". Guided by a mounted camera and controlled via an app, doctors will also be able to communicate with patients through the robot, Kebe said, potentially allowing them to treat people isolated in hard-to-reach rural areas.

Senegal's coronavirus outbreak pales in comparison to the situation in virus-stricken Europe and the United States. But after a slow start, confirmed cases in the nation of some 16 million people are increasing. And as with other poor countries in the region, there are fears that Senegal is ill equipped to handle a large outbreak. Authorities have recorded more than 1,700 cas-

es to date, including 19 fatalities. Hospital staff in Dakar are also beginning to contract COVID-19.

Faced with an increased threat, frontline Senegalese doctors are taking the young engineers seriously. An initial prototype designed by the students was essentially a small mobile trolley, designed to carry equipment or meals to patients. But Abdoulaye Bousso, the head of an emergency ward in a Dakar hospital, asked to redesign it to include mechanical arms capable of conducting medical tests – an upgrade the students are working on now. "It's a whole process," Bousso said, adding that the robot could cut down on their use of expensive bibs and gowns, which must be thrown away. Ndiaga Ndiaye, an ESP professor in charge of marketing the inventions, said that the university has long emphasized practical projects and entrepreneurship, which meant students were poised to act when the virus broke out. The robot is "far from being a gadget," he said, and could be produced at a larger scale once ready. "We are a public institution. There is one concept

that binds us all together, and that is service to the community," he said.

Other students have devised simpler devices that they also hope will battle the disease in Senegal. Gianna Andjembe, a masters student in electrical engineering, has designed an automatic hand-sanitizer dispenser that he said could reduce the need for staff in schools and hospitals to supervise hand-washing. "It's very simple, it's basic," said the 26-year-old. "As scientists, as engineers, we have to meet the challenges and really take our destiny into our own hands," Andjembe added.

The coronavirus has upended ESP students' lives. Lectures are now held over video and students who used to tinker in labs until late at night must now rush home owing to a dusk-to-dawn curfew. But the crisis has also given the young engineers a sense of purpose. "What has changed is the responsibility," robotmaker Kebe said before adding that the students also felt "much more patriotism". — AFP

Europe quickens reopening; Iran...

Continued from Page 1

"If a community or a state or region doesn't go by those guidelines and reopens... the consequences could be really serious," he said Tuesday. "There is a real risk that you will trigger an outbreak that you may not be able to control." Fauci said the true number killed by the epidemic in the US is likely greater than the official toll of over 82,000 – the world's highest. On Tuesday the US registered 1,894 coronavirus deaths in 24 hours, a steep rise after daily tolls fell below 1,000 on Sunday and Monday.

Fauci's cautionary message stands at odds with rhetoric from President Donald Trump, who has pressed for rapid steps to rekindle the devastated US economy before a November election. Trump has sought to shift focus onto the role played by China, where the virus first emerged in December. Republican allies in the Senate on Tuesday proposed legislation that would empower the president to impose sanctions on Beijing if it does not give a "full accounting" for the outbreak.

"The Chinese Communist Party must be held accountable for the detrimental role they played in this pandemic," said Senator Jim Inhofe. "Their outright deception of the origin and spread of the virus cost the world valuable time and lives as it began to spread." In the House of Representatives meanwhile, Democrats unveiled a \$3 trillion virus response package, the largest yet, to fund efforts to fight the pandemic and provide emergency payments to millions of American households.

The lifting of lockdowns across Europe has gathered pace this week, with France beginning to reopen primary schools and nurseries. Teachers wore face masks and desks were separated as children filed back into classrooms. Russia began easing lockdown rules even as infections surged past 232,000 – now the second most cases in the world after the US. The nation hit the landmark on Tuesday after a week of reporting more than 10,000 daily cases. President Vladimir Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, has also tested positive for the virus.

For those braving public transport in Moscow, masks and gloves were a must in line with new anti-virus rules. "It's protection, I hope it will work," said 48-year-old Natalia Goronok, travelling on the metro. "It is scary that cases are going up, but people do need to live." — AFP

rants and food delivery services, and finally, the closure of vegetable stands.

Kuwait Times contacted the Forda Market, the Farmers' Union and government authorities responsible for the fresh fruit and vegetable supply chain, but did not receive a response by publication time. Not all grocery stores are short on vegetables. Kuwait Times spoke with shoppers in Salmiya, Salwa and Khaitan among other areas and all affirmed that fruits and vegetables are readily available in co-ops and groceries. Also, some residents said baqalas and other grocery markets are delivering fresh vegetables daily.

breach of the constitution.

The health ministry has assured that all its contracts signed during the crisis have been reviewed and approved by the Audit Bureau and other monitoring agencies. MP Abdulkarim Al-Kandari called on the government yesterday to distribute face-masks to citizens and expatriates free of charge after the health minister issued a decision making wearing masks mandatory for all. The lawmaker said it is unacceptable that people are forced to wear masks while they are either unavailable or monopolized by some.

The informal meeting by MPs yesterday was expected to call on the government to scrap a decision allowing people a two-hour daily exercise window between 4.30 pm to 6.30 pm because of overcrowding. MP Mohammad Hayef said allowing walks given the large numbers of people amounts to applying the herd immunity policy, which is very dangerous.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia will enforce a round-the-clock nationwide curfew during the five-day Eid al-Fitr holiday later this month to fight the coronavirus, the interior ministry said Tuesday, as infections spike. The kingdom, which has reported the highest number of virus cases in the Gulf region, is scrambling to limit the spread of the deadly disease.

A full lockdown will be re-imposed around the country from May 23-27, the ministry said in a statement released by the official Saudi Press Agency. The

Gloves, masks litter Mideast...

Continued from Page 1

masks could pose a risk of transmission to whoever cleans them up. Since the coronavirus emerged in China in December, countries across the Middle East have reported 7,711 deaths and 233,522 COVID-19 cases.

In Saudi Arabia, which has reported over 40,000 coronavirus cases, some supermarkets have introduced rules requiring shoppers to wear disposable gloves. Many discard them in the parking lots after they emerge, with the plastic waste blowing in the hot desert wind. Amid panic buying by shoppers, pharmacies in Saudi Arabia have seen persistent shortages of items such as disposable gloves, masks and sanitizers.

The run on the protective gear has come even as opinion is divided on how useful they are. The World Health Organization says washing hands regularly is more effective than wearing gloves for preventing the spread of the virus. The US Centre for Disease

Control advises ordinary people to wear washable cloth masks in public, allowing in-demand single-use respirators and surgical masks to be used by health-care workers and other at-risk groups.

In the Palestinian enclave of Gaza on the eastern Mediterranean, the beachfront – already polluted with rubbish – is now also littered with masks and gloves. The items are designed to be single use, are not recyclable and most will not biodegrade making them an unsightly source of pollution and potential hazard to marine life if they end up in the ocean.

Some small shop owners have taken the initiative to collect them and put them in the trash bin but the beach has long been dotted with rubbish, with poor Gazans often dumping their waste there. Lina Ouda, who was out for a stroll with her husband, stopped to pick up several discarded items. "I noticed masks and gloves lying on the cornice and put them in the garbage bin because these things pollute the beach," the 30-year-old told AFP.

Her husband Jamal Ouda explained: "There is no general culture of cleaning the beaches in Gaza but some people take the initiative to collect the remnants of protective medical gear such as masks and put them in the trash." But unfortunately, he said, "many people walk wearing masks and gloves and (at the end) throw them on the ground." — AFP

Veg shortage due to supply...

Continued from Page 1

Fourth, the daily purchase of fruits and vegetables has dropped due to the full curfew. Fifth, the Forda market shopping appointments system was halted for individuals. Sixth, the closure of restau-

7 deaths, 751 new virus cases...

Continued from Page 1

still go to the chamber and then adjourn the session over the absence of government, then invite lawmakers for an informal meeting at his office to discuss the same issues. The presence of at least one minister is mandatory for an Assembly session to be legal.

He said the meeting will discuss contracts made by the government during the coronavirus crisis after allegations that some of the contracts were highly inflated. The Cabinet has already said it will ask the Audit Bureau to study all contracts signed since March 1, especially those related to the health ministry.

Two former MPs, Hassan Jowhar and Obaid Al-Wasmi, claimed during a virtual television interview that a contract to import facemasks was exaggerated several times when compared with similar contracts in neighboring countries. The two politicians have reportedly been referred to the public prosecution for investigation over spreading false news amid outrage by a large number of lawmakers, who insisted the government measure constitutes a

Sigh of relief as KU flights take...

Continued from Page 1

purge the country of illegal residents. While a few countries allowed the repatriation of their citizens to their countries, Indian workers remained in amnesty shelters as the India government kept its

period coincides with the festival that marks the end of the holy fasting month of Ramadan. Most parts of the kingdom were put under full lockdown following the outbreak, but last month the government relaxed the curfew between the hours of 9 am and 5 pm.

Malls and retailers have been allowed to reopen, except in major hotspots including the holy city of Makkah – where confirmed cases have soared, despite a stringent lockdown. The health ministry said Tuesday the number of COVID-19 deaths had risen to 264 and confirmed infections to 42,925, while 15,257 people have recovered.

In March, Saudi Arabia suspended the year-round umrah pilgrimage over fears of the disease spreading in Islam's holiest cities. Authorities are yet to announce whether they will proceed with this year's hajj – scheduled for late July – but they have urged Muslims to temporarily defer preparations for the annual pilgrimage. Last year, some 2.5 million faithful travelled to Saudi Arabia from across the world to participate in the hajj, which Muslims are obliged to perform at least once during their lifetime.

The Arab world's biggest economy has also closed cinemas and restaurants and halted flights as it attempts to contain the virus. King Salman has warned of a "more difficult" fight ahead against COVID-19, as the kingdom faces the double blow of virus-led shutdowns and crashing oil prices.

The United Arab Emirates business and tourism hub Dubai has allowed public parks to reopen and

airspace closed to foreign airlines until last week in a bid to contain the COVID-19 pandemic.

The amnesty program for people in the country without residency permits ran from April 1 to April 30, 2020 allowing violators to leave the country. As part of the program, the government announced it would forgo all residency-related penalties of amnesty-seekers and offered a 30 percent waiver on all other debts or fines incurred by them. According to official estimates, there were around 24,400 illegal Indian residents in Kuwait as of Feb 28, 2020.

hotel guests to access private beaches, state media said, as the emirate gradually lifts restrictions imposed to combat the coronavirus. Dubai, the most populous of the seven emirates that make up the UAE, on April 24 eased a full curfew to eight hours at night, and allowed dine-in restaurants and shopping malls to reopen at limited capacity.

Public parks are now open for groups of up to five people, state news agency WAM reported late on Tuesday. Hotel guests must practice physical distancing at beaches. Tram and ferry services also resumed and groups of up to five can now practice recreational activities in open areas. Mosques, cinemas, public beaches and nightclubs remain closed.

Other emirates have followed Dubai in easing restrictions. In the UAE capital Abu Dhabi, some malls have resumed business, while Sharjah reopened malls and dine-in restaurants. The UAE has so far reported 19,661 infections and 203 deaths from the virus, the second highest death toll among six Gulf states. It does not disclose numbers for individual emirates.

The UAE, like other Gulf Arab countries, had ramped up testing after recording a spread of the disease among low-wage migrant workers living in overcrowded accommodation. On Tuesday, the UAE announced that tests would now be free for all Emirati citizens and domestic workers, in addition to the disabled, pregnant women and residents over 50 years of age.

Stars

Daily SuDoku

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very hard

Yesterday's Solution

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

easy

STAR TRACK

Aries (March 21-April 19)

The good news is it can only get better. For today, however, there may be some trying times in store, Aries. If you're a parent, your cabin-feverish children will beg for something every five minutes. If you retreat to your home office, you'll still feel pressure from all sides. Not even your love life is immune from hovering doubt. No compromise is possible today.

Libra (September 23-October 22)

Today's aspects are suggesting that you take a good hard look at the state of your ego, Libra. Are you too proud or too humble? Buddhists say that the path to spiritual fulfillment lies in knowing how to build a healthy ego while at the same time developing a part of oneself completely foreign to the ego. Are you working hard at this?

Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Today you might rethink those social norms that you take at face value, Taurus. Like the rest of us, you learned and unthinkingly accepted them at a young age. Established concepts of propriety are especially deserving of consideration. After hearing for years about all those things that "just aren't done," isn't it refreshing to think that maybe they should be done after all? As long as you're sheltering in place, who's to know?

Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

A small crisis is still a crisis, Scorpio. In the midst of this global crisis, expect to face a personal one today. Since you don't like unresolved issues, you won't want to put off dealing with your problems any longer. Questions abound. Are you and your partner equally sharing work and responsibilities? Are you making equal efforts to maintain relationship harmony? Asking questions is the first step toward answering them.

Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Today is an ideal day to shop for a new wardrobe, Gemini. Maybe your usual style is feeling too conventional or uncomfortably trendy. When shopping online, you tend to reject items you really like for fear that they're too suggestive or old-fashioned. Listen to your own judgment for a change instead of being so concerned with what other people might think.

Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Something has to change, Sagittarius. You knew it when you woke up this morning. Your mirror provides the impetus for some important resolutions. Is it time to begin a diet, commit to more exercise, or strengthen your resolve to quit smoking? Anything you do to improve your health will make you feel better about yourself, and loved ones will worry less during these risky times.

Cancer (June 21-July 22)

The topic of the day is knowledge and learning, Cancer. Did you actually study in the field that excited you when you were younger? Do you feel ashamed about never attending such-and-such a school or program? If these issues are uppermost in your mind, remember that your creativity has little to do with the degrees you hold and everything to do with how you use your skills and knowledge to better the world.

Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

The only good thing about riding an emotional roller coaster is that you never feel the same way for long, Capricorn. One moment you're up, the next you're down. You don't know what you want today. Rather than bring your loved ones along on this wild ride, retreat from your usual environment. You're better off alone until this mood lifts.

Leo (July 23-August 22)

An important aspect has passed, and you're positioned to reap the benefit from it, Leo. It was only a matter of becoming aware of and settling certain matters related to your need for social recognition. Don't be so hungry for approval, Leo. Most people contain a stem inner authority figure and can survive comfortably and self-sufficiently. In fact, it's your greatest strength.

Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

You might want to check your alarm clock to be sure it really woke you up this morning, Aquarius. Your tendency will be to stay in the cocoon of your own little dream world, deep in your own thoughts. Sheltering in place has turned many people inward, but obsessive thoughts may be drowning out some pressing issues from the past that really need to be dealt with once and for all.

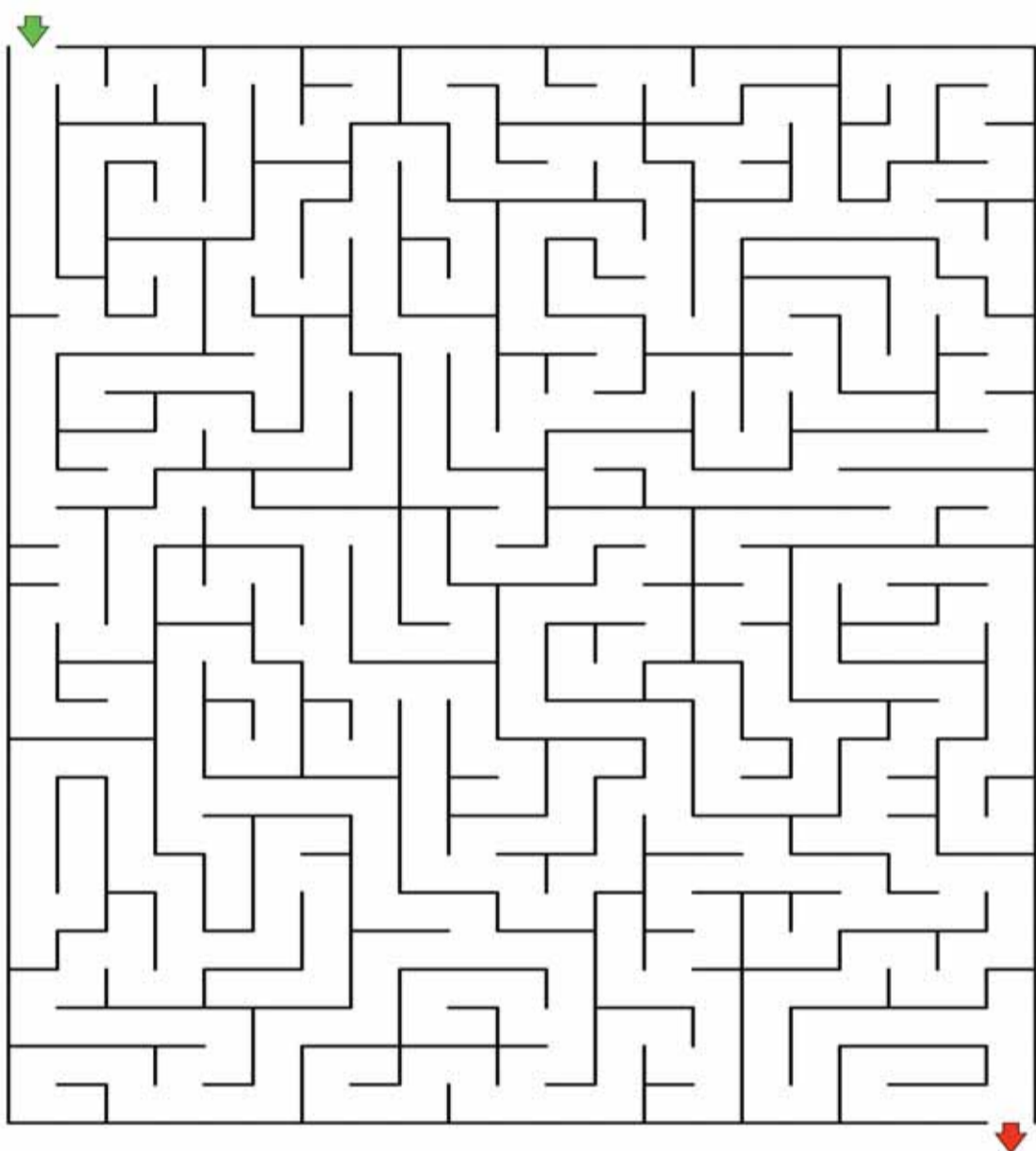
Virgo (August 23-September 22)

You may feel hemmed in by the role models that society currently offers, Virgo. As you struggle to find your own definition of the truly modern human being, the people in your life sometimes criticize your liberated attitude. Just because their ideas aren't in sync with yours doesn't make yours any less valid. Maybe your ideas aren't too radical/maybe theirs are too conventional! There's room for both points of view.

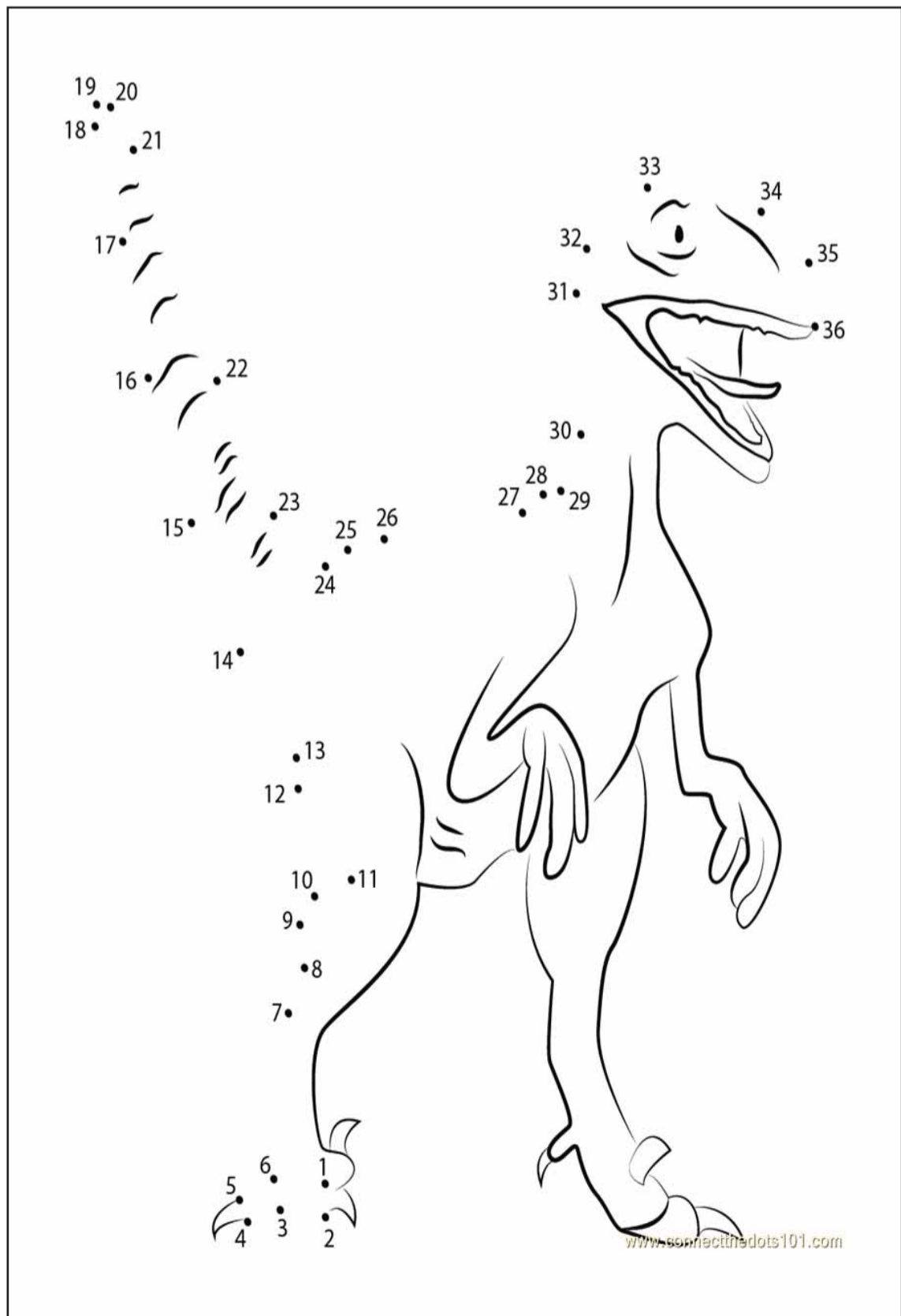
Pisces (February 19-March 20)

There is something in the air today pushing you toward change or renewal, Pisces. Is it time to change your wardrobe or redecorate your home? Roll up your sleeves and get busy. If you have monetary restrictions or don't feel up for an online shopping spree, you'll find it just as fulfilling (and a whole lot cheaper) to simply rid your home of all the things that aren't "you" anymore.

Find the way



Join the dots









Word Search

Breakfast Favorites

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

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

Photo of the day



BERLIN: Matthias Dolderer of Germany at the Red Bull Air Race World Championship in Germany in 2018. —Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

Young sumo wrestler dies of coronavirus

TOKYO: A 28-year-old sumo wrestler died in Japan yesterday after contracting coronavirus and suffering multiple organ failure, becoming the ancient sport's first COVID-19 fatality, the national association said.

Shobushi, a lower-ranking wrestler belonging to the Takadagawa stable in Tokyo, died early Wednesday after battling the disease for more than a month. He developed a fever over April 4-5 but had trouble contacting the local public health office because phone lines were constantly busy, the Sumo Association said in a statement.

He was then turned away by several hospitals before finally being admitted to a Tokyo hospital on the evening of April 8 after he started coughing up blood, it added. An initial coronavirus test there came back negative but he then tested positive on April 10 after being transferred to another hospital, where he was placed in intensive care on April 19.

Sumo association chief Hakkaku, who uses a single name, said the news was devastating. "We cannot find any words to say when we think about the broken hearts of his family. "It must have been so very painful to fight the disease for over a month but, like a sumo wrestler, he persevered and endured, fighting to the very end," Hakkaku said.

"We only wish that he rests in peace now," he added, thanking medical workers and trainees as well as a sumo stable master have tested positive for the virus in Japan.

The outbreak has also forced the association to cancel its upcoming tournament, which had been scheduled for this month. A basho has only been cancelled one other time in over half a century, in 2011, over a bout-fixing scandal.

The spring basho, held in March in Osaka, took place without spectators, with wrestlers surrounded by just a handful of judges in the empty arena. But it was broadcast live on national TV, where viewers could hear sounds normally drowned out by the crowd, including wrestlers slapping their bellies and scraping their feet on the clay ring. —AFP

Vettel to quit Ferrari at end of season after contract talks break down

There is no dream of another team, I am with my dream team: Hamilton

PARIS: Four-time Formula One world champion Sebastian Vettel on Tuesday announced his dramatic departure from Ferrari at the end of the season, saying there was no "common desire" to work together any more.

The team named no replacement for the German, who dominated F1 with Red Bull before switching to the Italian marque in 2015. Vettel said his shock exit from one of the dream drives on the grid was a "joint decision".

"My relationship with Scuderia Ferrari will finish at the end of 2020," the 32-year-old said in a statement from the team. "In order to get the best possible results in this sport, it's vital for all parties to work in perfect harmony.

"The team and I have realised that there is no longer a common desire to stay together beyond the end of this season." Vettel, who has won 14 races with Ferrari and 53 overall in his career, insisted financial considerations played no role in his decision.

Yet it has been widely reported that after being outpaced by 22-year-old teammate Charles Leclerc in 2019, Ferrari had offered Vettel only a one-year contract extension at a significantly reduced salary. He said he would "reflect on what really matters when it comes to my future".

UNDER PRESSURE FROM LECLERC

Team principal Mattia Binotto said Vettel's departure was "a decision taken jointly by ourselves and Sebastian, one which both parties feel is for the best". "It was not an easy decision to reach, given Sebastian's worth as a driver and as a

person," Binotto added.

"There was no specific reason that led to this decision, apart from the common and amicable belief that the time had come to go our separate ways in order to reach our respective objectives."

Vettel's departure will spark intense speculation about his replacement, with reigning world champion Lewis Hamilton among the drivers previously linked with a move to Maranello.

The Briton has indicated however he will be staying at Mercedes. Last month Hamilton told his

“

A decision taken jointly

”

Instagram followers: "There is no dream of another team. I am with my dream team.

"There's not a thing in my way, as I'm not trying to move. I'm with the people who have cared for day one."

Aside from the all-conquering Briton, who is targeting Michael Schumacher's record of seven world titles, other names tipped to take over from Vettel are McLaren driver Carlos Sainz and Daniel Ricciardo.

The Australian is in the last of a lucrative two-year contract with Renault. Asked about the possibility of replacing Vettel, the Italian-speaking, Perth-born Ricciardo told AFP in February: "To be honest, I'm obviously answering all calls."

Ricciardo would be a popular choice among Ferrari's legion of fans, as would Antonio Giovinazzi, in his second season with Alfa Romeo. Vettel, like his predecessor Fernando Alonso, has been unable to bring home the drivers' title for Ferrari with Kimi Raikkonen the team's last champion in 2007.

Last year Vettel was time and again put in the shade by Leclerc, the prodigious talent who is 10 years his junior and entering his second season with Ferrari. The driver from Monaco claimed seven poles in his maiden season at Maranello, winning twice including an emotional triumph at Monza.

Leclerc, who in December extended his contract until 2024, told Vettel: "It's been a huge honour for me to be your teammate. We've had some tense moments on tracks.

"Some very good ones and some others that didn't end as we both wanted, but there was always respect, even though it wasn't perceived this way from the outside. "I've never learnt so much as I did with you as my team-mate. Thank you for everything Seb."

The coronavirus pandemic has wiped away the start of the 2020 F1 season with 10 races either cancelled or postponed. It hopes to open its season with back-to-back races in Austria on July 5 and 12, behind closed doors. —AFP



MEXICO CITY: File photo taken on October 26, 2019. Ferrari's German driver Sebastian Vettel waves after finishing on third position during the F1 Mexico Grand Prix qualifying session at the Hermanos Rodriguez circuit in Mexico City. Vettel will leave Ferrari at the end of the 2020 season, AFP reports on May 12, 2020. —AFP

Three of women's top 10 to star as golf returns in S Korea

SEOUL: Leading professional golfers will return to competitive action for the first time in months after the coronavirus shutdown when three of the world's top 10 women tee off in South Korea today. The domestic showpiece KLPGA Championship will follow the country's football and baseball leagues in starting behind closed doors at the Lakewood Country Club in Yangju, northeast of Seoul.

World number three Park Sung-hyun, sixth-ranked Kim Sei-young and number 10 Lee Jeong-eun will be in a 150-strong field chasing a \$180,000 winner's cheque from a record tournament purse of \$2.5 million, the highest in the event's 42-year history.

South Korea — which endured one of the worst early outbreaks of the disease outside mainland China — has brought COVID-19 under control with a widespread "trace, test and treat" model and has begun to resume professional sport.

South Korean players dominate women's golf and the US-based LPGA tour with three golfers ranked in the world's top six and eight players in the top 20.

Two-time major winner Park, nine-time winner on the LPGA Tour Kim and current US Open champion Lee were already back home in the country. They

had returned after the LPGA season was suspended in February because of the pandemic following the Australian Open, which was won by another Korean, the world number 11 Park In-bee.

'CENTRE OF ATTENTION'

No spectators will be allowed inside Lakewood Country Club and strict protocols will be in place to guard against the risk of infection. All players and staff will have their temperature checked before entering the venue and all support personnel must wear face masks at all times.

Players turning up for practice rounds yesterday were required to wear masks before and after play. Some opted to don one on the course, where they were kept at least two metres from their competitors and were careful to keep contact with caddies to a minimum.

Media covering the tournament are restricted to two designated areas on the course at the first and 10th tees. Each player will have to eat meals alone to maintain social distancing, with no caddies or family members allowed to sit at the same table in the players' lounge.

Only four LPGA Tour events have been completed this year — the last in Adelaide on February 16 — and the tour has outlined plans to resume in mid-July in Michigan. The men's US PGA Tour, which came to a juddering halt when the Players Championship was abandoned after the first round in March, has pencilled in a restart behind closed doors at the Charles Schwab Challenge beginning June 11 at Fort Worth, Texas. —AFP

Champions Cup final in Marseille set for October 17

PARIS: The coronavirus-postponed Champions Cup final could now be held on October 17 in Marseille with the second-tier Challenge Cup fixture a day earlier, the organisers said on Tuesday.

Both tournaments were suspended at the quarter-finals stage due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The last-eight and semi-finals of the competitions could take place from mid-September onwards. The director general of European Professional Club Rugby (EPCR) Vincent Gaillard told AFP: "This schedule has been co-ordinated with the three professional leagues in Europe but remains subject to external factors, be that health, medical or logistical."

"The month of October remains a window traditionally kept for clubs and European Cups and we envisage making the most of it," he added.

Reports have claimed World Rugby want to play Test matches during October, and the English and French leagues wrote to the global governing body on Monday asking for further discussions about the use of the month.

Gaillard said EPCR wants further talks between the parties and remains open about the dates.

"Everyone knows compromises will have to be made. It's very clear. Our opinion is not to say 'we will play in October as if it was business as usual'. We have to consider all parties, not just the unions, and find a solution together," he said.

"If this solution leads us to finding an alternative which would be not playing in October but another moment, then so be it," he added.

'COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE' BOYCOTT

Earlier on Monday, French newspaper Midi Olympique claimed Top 14 sides could refuse to feature in next season's top-tier competition if an increase to eight clubs from the league cannot feature in the continental tournament.

"The threats of a boycott were blown out of proportion. As far as I know, this threat had not been discussed formally by the French league or by the clubs," Gaillard said.

"If this boycott threat is proven, but I don't think it will be, it would be totally counter-productive," he added. Gaillard said the body could change the makeup of the Champions Cup due to the impact the virus outbreak has had on the end of domestic campaigns.

"We have to find a format that's adaptable. A certain number of options are on the table... To consider the exceptional circumstances for the end of the season for each of our three leagues," Gaillard said. "We will adapt and we have a format for 24 clubs, which is very attractive if needed. In principle we should have a solution in June." —AFP

Sports

With little competition, the Bundesliga goes global

Germany will provide a much-needed fix of live sport

PARIS: German football will find itself in an unaccustomed global spotlight this weekend as audiences starved of live football turn to the only major European league back in action. With the Premier League, Spain's La Liga and Serie A in Italy all still sidelined by the coronavirus pandemic, the Bundesliga will take centre stage on Saturday.

Even in Brazil, media coverage has switched from domestic football stories to what TV viewers can expect to see when Borussia Dortmund meet Schalke in the biggest match of the opening day, albeit it without spectators in the stadium.

Cable channel Fox Sports, which holds exclusive rights to show the Bundesliga in Brazil, will be showing the Ruhr Derby at 9:30 am local time. Its website already features a lengthy article about the games entitled "The wait will soon be over".

Even Brazil's biggest media group, Globo, is getting in on the act with interviews with four Brazilians who play for Bundesliga clubs, including Wolfsburg midfielder William, who admitted players were "a little bit scared" about the implications for their health.

In India, foreign football leagues have found a market in India's urban youth who keenly follow the Premier League and support clubs like Chelsea, Liverpool and Manchester United. But a few of these fans also watch La Liga and Bundesliga.

"I am desperately waiting for the Bundesliga to start this weekend. I am thirsty for live football action in this lockdown," Amjad Rehan Ibrahim, a student of Delhi University, told AFP.

'A BAROMETER'

Indian international forward Jeje Lalpekhlua said he would also be tuning in to the coverage on Indian broadcasters Star Sports and Hotstar: "It's difficult without football for so long. I am surely going to watch it."

In Japan, rights holder Sky Perfect is going to show two Bundesliga matches this weekend free of charge. In Europe too, the matches in Germany will provide a much-needed fix of live sport.

Adolfo Barbero, who commentates on Bundesliga games for the Spanish channel Movistar+, said: "I can assure you that I haven't seen this level of interest in the Bundesliga in 20 years. Normally people support Bayern Munich, Dortmund or even Bayer Leverkusen and that's it."

"But now they are also looking forward to seeing Fortuna Duesseldorf and Paderborn. It's crazy." In Mexico, football

journalists are grateful for something to cover — and the sorely-missed revenue live sport generates.

"For those of us who make a living from football the fact there hasn't been any activity really affects us. A weekend without football is really difficult," said Emilio Fernando Alonso, a Mexican reporter for ESPN.

In China, where the Super League might not begin until June, German football's meticulously planned return is being closely watched.

Writing in the Oriental Sports Daily, columnist Ji Yuyang said the biggest challenge for the Bundesliga was not restarting during the pandemic, but being able to outlast it because



BERLIN: File photo taken on March 11, 2020 shows Moenchengladbach's Swiss forward Bree Elmbolo celebrates scoring the opening goal during the German first division Bundesliga football match. The Bundesliga resumes with strict sanitary rules for players and spectators that could inspire other countries amid the pandemic of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). —AFP

of financial pressures that clubs were facing due to the health crisis.

"Half of the teams in the top two leagues are in danger of going bankrupt, according to estimates in Germany," Ji wrote.

"So for many German clubs, whether it was better to wait for failure or risk restarting, they chose the latter." The quarantine and social distancing measures that

Bundesliga clubs have instituted are also being scrutinised in Italy and Spain, whose leagues are some way from being able to consider resuming.

"It will be a barometer, the reference point for all the others... if it all goes well it will be a great success and if there's a big problem it will have a similarly powerful negative effect," Movistar+ commentator Barbero said. —AFP

Akmal, Pakistan enfant terrible, faces reckoning

KARACHI: If ever a soap opera were to be made about Pakistan cricket, Umar Akmal might be a good candidate for the role of enfant terrible. The talented-yet-wayward batsman is scrambling to save his once-promising career, after he was hit with a three-year ban for failing to report match-fixing offers.

Umar is expected to learn the fate of an appeal to last month's disciplinary action on or about May 26, which also happens to be his 30th birthday. Right now, the signs don't look good. Umar declined to speak to AFP for this story, but several experts suggested Pakistan's close-knit cricketing world is fed up.

"Umar is not prepared to show remorse and seek apology," the judgement accompanying Umar's ban states. Ramiz Raja, a former Pakistan captain and a well-known cricket analyst, said he was "pained to see such a talent go waste".

"Cricket cannot condone such behaviour and fans need to realise that rooting for tainted players is actually harming Pakistan cricket and its image," Raja told AFP. Umar's Test career exploded into life with a century in his 2009 debut

in New Zealand, a feat that prompted commentators to describe him a "future star".

But his expanding profile was soon tempered with disciplinary problems. His two brothers — Kamran and Adnan — also played for Pakistan but never got into hot water. Within months of his first international outing, Umar reportedly feigned an injury in a bid to skip a Test in Australia, in protest over Kamran being dropped.

He was fined and placed on a six-month probation. Even the astute Misbah-ul-Haq — Pakistan's most successful Test captain — could not rein in Umar. Following an irresponsible shot in a 2011 Test in Zimbabwe, he never again selected Umar for the longer format.

The following year, he was fined and reprimanded for an altercation with umpires during the Twenty20 World Cup in Sri Lanka. He ran into trouble off the field too. In 2014, he was arrested in his native Lahore over a scuffle with a traffic warden.

He has repeatedly grabbed headlines for partying late into the night, ending in yet more fines and reprimands.

'ONLY HIMSELF TO BLAME'

A dozen captains and coaches tried to keep Umar on track, but without luck. Waqar Younis had two coaching stints from 2010 to 2016, and ended up recommending an undisciplined "Umar be kept away from the national



Umar Akmal

team for some time".

After Waqar, coach Mickey Arthur, of South Africa, had several run-ins with Umar. In 2017 Arthur sent him home days before the start of the Champions Trophy after he failed a fitness test.

Later that year he received a three-month ban after a spat with Arthur in the national cricket academy in Lahore. Arthur, now head coach of Sri Lanka, said he wasn't surprised by Umar's recent problems.

"I feel nothing for guys who waste their talent like he has... he

should be the disappointed one!" Arthur told AFP in a WhatsApp message. "He will only have himself to blame and should have taken responsibility for his career instead of always looking to make excuses and blame others."

Despite promises, Umar did not change. "I want to ask forgiveness of all fans who have been hurt by my conduct," Umar said in 2017. "I am ready to commit to cricket. I still have a lot of cricket left in me and I aim to make another international comeback." But it seems he has now run out of chances. —AFP

Scotland's infighting shows perils of calling season to a halt

LONDON: The Scottish Professional Football League (SPFL) will not face an independent investigation after winning the support of its member clubs at an extraordinary general meeting on Tuesday.

However, the division and rancour that has soured the Scottish game for the past month stands as a warning to other leagues around Europe, who may also have to bring their seasons to a premature end.

The SPFL's conduct has been called into question over a controversial resolution that allowed the three leagues below the top-flight to be declared over on points-per-game, paving the way for the Premiership to potentially follow suit. The plan came down to one vote from Championship side Dundee, which the SPFL said it did not receive due to a technological glitch. Dundee had voted against the resolution in the first instance. But when asked to cast their ballot again then performed a U-turn, sparking the suspicions and anger of those who stood to lose out.

Rangers have led the crusade against the league's hierarchy. Should the Premiership season

also be decided on points-per-game, their bitter rivals Celtic would be crowned champions for a record-equalling ninth consecutive season thanks to a 13-point lead at the top when the campaign was halted.

Hearts, four points adrift at the bottom, are set to be relegated from the top-flight.

"It is fundamentally wrong that any club should be unfairly penalised by exceptional decisions that have had to be taken to deal with the current crisis," said Hearts chairman Ann Budge. Partick Thistle have a case to be the most unfairly treated as they sit just two points from safety at the bottom of the Championship, but with a game in hand.

Stranraer would also be prematurely relegated from League One, while Inverness and Falkirk have voiced their frustration at seeing their claim to a promotion playoff denied. Rangers accused the SPFL of bullying and coercing clubs into voting for their plan and even went as far as to call for the suspension of chief executive Neil Doncaster.

FINANCIAL CRISIS

The Glasgow giants released a 200-page dossier to make their case last week and gained support for their call for an independent investigation from 13 of the 42 clubs. However, it did not get the required support of 75 percent of clubs, most of whom are more concerned with ensuring they survive the financial crisis.

"All of our energies should be applied to plan-

ning for the return of the game in season 2020-21 and to the financial survival of all our clubs," said Celtic in a statement after the vote. Understandably, the one thing all the clubs have in common is self-interest.

Had the SPFL gone the other way and decided against crowning champions and denying promotion, then Celtic, Dundee United, Raith Rovers and Cove Rangers would be the ones "unfairly penalised".

The problem of clubs protecting their own interests was clear on Friday when a meeting of Premiership teams ruled out the possibility of league reconstruction. Proposals to increase the size of the leagues would have saved those that stand to go down from relegation and promoted the teams in second place of the Championship, League One and League Two, who will now miss out on a playoff.

But at a time of economic crisis, Premiership clubs were unwilling to see their share of a new television rights deal for next season watered down. "We were concerned that there was a potential risk to the broadcast deal which is the only realistic source of income for all 42 clubs for the foreseeable future," St Johnstone said in a statement on Tuesday.

As other leagues battle with the logistics of finishing the season behind closed doors, or the legal minefield of calling the season to a halt, the lesson from Scotland's fallout is sobering. There is no easy solution that will satisfy everyone. —AFP

S Korea Oly judo star given life ban over alleged sexual assault

SEOUL: A South Korean judo star who won a silver medal at the 2008 Olympics has been banned for life from the sport's national body over allegations of sexual assault against a teenager. Wang Ki-chun rose to fame after coming second in the men's under 73-kilo category in Beijing despite suffering a rib cage fracture in the early rounds. He was arrested earlier this month for the alleged sexual assault of a minor, and if convicted could be jailed for life.

In a unanimous decision, the Korea Judo Association banned the 31-year-old over the incident, effectively ending his sporting career.

The association said it took into account Wang's "inappropriate" conduct which undermined the "integrity and social standing of judo" when deciding on the life ban, according to Yonhap news agency. Wang has seven days to lodge an appeal.

ABUSE IS RIFE

South Korea is a regional sporting power and regularly in the top 10 medal table places at the summer and winter Olympics.

But in an already intensely competitive society, winning is virtually everything in its sports community — and physical and verbal abuse are rife. Just last week, Olympic short-track speed skating medalist Lim Hyo-jun was convicted of sexually harassing a fellow male athlete by pulling down his trousers, fined 3 million won (\$2,450) and ordered to undergo 40 hours of therapy for sex offenders. —AFP

FIFA postpones women's U-17 WCup to 2021

NEW DELHI: The women's Under-17 World Cup, due to be held in India in November, has been postponed for three months, FIFA said Tuesday, adding to a growing list of sporting events hit by the pandemic. The tournament, to be played in five cities across the country, will now start February 17, football's governing body said. India is looking to boost its international standing as a host of top sporting events after holding the men's Under-17 World Cup in 2017. "All the host cities have put in a lot of effort and commitment so far, and we are happy that the new dates will allow them to make up for the lost time and provide momentum going forward," the local organising committee said after the FIFA announcement.

FIFA also unveiled new dates for this year's U-20 Women's World Cup in Costa Rica and Panama. It will now be played from January 20 to February 6, 2021. The 2020 FIFA Futsal World Cup in Lithuania has been pushed back to September 12 next year. —AFP

18 Vettel to quit Ferrari at end of season after contract talks break down



19 With little competition, the Bundesliga goes global



19 Akmal, Pakistan enfant terrible, faces reckoning



EPL players face strict new training protocols



(LIVERPOOL: File photo shows a television camera operator films Liverpool's German manager Jurgen Klopp following the English Premier League football match between Liverpool and Arsenal at Anfield. Premier League clubs face having to pay a huge refund to broadcasters even if they manage to complete the coronavirus-disrupted season behind closed doors. Broadcasters would be reimbursed for matches not being played as scheduled and the lack of atmosphere in empty stadiums is also a factor. — AFP

LONDON: Premier League players are set to be subjected to a strict testing regime if they are to return to training amid the coronavirus pandemic, according to British media reports.

The BBC said Tuesday it had seen a copy of official protocols sent to all 20 Premier League clubs detailing the need for corner-flags, balls, cones, goalposts and even playing surfaces to be disinfected after each training session.

Other measures in the guidance include twice-weekly testing, and a daily pre-training questionnaire and temperature check. Should a player test positive, with or without symptoms, they will be forced to self-isolate for seven days.

All players will have to travel to a training ground individually and avoid public transport. Once there they will not be allowed to gather in communal areas and won't be fed on the premises. Tackling and contact will reportedly be banned for the first phase of team training.

Meanwhile club medical staff must wear personal protection equipment when treating the players. A meeting involving players, the Professional Footballers' Association and the British government over safety and health issues surrounding

a possible restart of the game is set to take place on Wednesday.

PFA chief executive Gordon Taylor, said his members would be open to playing again provided "everything that can be done is being done" to assure their safety.

"We've got to try it, see if we can do it and see if we can return to some form of activity," Taylor told the Mirror. "But it's also being as careful and having as many assurances as possible that it's achievable."

However, England internationals Raheem Sterling and Danny Rose are the two latest high-profile players to raise their concerns over a return to contact sport when the rest of society is being advised to follow social-distancing guidelines.

"The moment we do go back it just needs to be a moment where it's not just for footballing reasons, it's safe for not just us footballers but the whole medical staff, referees," Sterling told his YouTube channel.

representative on the World Rugby Council, nor as a member of the RWC Board, nor as president of Americas Rugby," Pichot said in a statement on the Argentina federation (UAR) website.

Pichot, who retired from the sport 11 years ago and had been World Rugby vice-chairman since 2016, hinted at trying for the top position again in the future. "My proposal, which I fervently believe in, has not been chosen, and that is why I choose to step aside," he said. "I cannot conceive of occupying a place just for the sake of occupying it."

"Although I will now be exclusively dedicated to family and personal matters, this does not mean that I am moving away from rugby. I will always contribute, from the place that touches me."

Former scrum-half Pichot helped make Sevens an Olympic sport and also elevated Argentina into the Rugby Championship and the Jaguars into Super Rugby. — AFP

Meanwhile Rose, on loan at Newcastle from Tottenham, told an Instagram live: "People's lives are at risk. Football shouldn't even be spoken about coming back until the numbers have dropped massively."

A further complication for Project Restart is where any matches would be played, with the clubs opposed to a proposal for a limited number of neutral venues to be used.

The UK's national football policing lead previously stated resuming matches on a home-and-away basis would "present challenges" to the emergency services. But Mark Roberts said on Tuesday that police, government and football authorities were working together on a plan "which minimises any risks to public safety and unnecessary pressure on public services, but facilitates a sensible restart to the season."

London Mayor Sadiq Khan has come out against the idea of playing matches in the capital at this stage, with the city having been particularly badly hit by the pandemic.

Five of the 20 Premier League sides are based in London. "With the country still in the grips of this crisis, and hundreds of people dying every day, he believes that it is too early to be discussing the resumption of the Premier League and top-flight sport in the capital," Khan's spokesperson told the Evening Standard.

Premier League clubs face having to pay a huge refund to broadcasters even if they manage to complete the virus-disrupted season behind closed doors. Broadcasters would be reimbursed for matches not being played as scheduled and the lack of atmosphere in empty stadiums is also a factor. The BBC reported the bill could be as high as £340 million (\$420 million) and would surge to £760 million if the season cannot be completed.

Premier League chief executive Richard Masters has previously warned of a £1 billion loss once the absence of gate receipts is taken into account. New government guidelines have paved the way for elite sport to return behind closed doors in England from June 1. Britain has been one of the worst hit by the global pandemic, with the UK government officially recording more than 32,000 deaths from COVID-19. — AFP



Twice-weekly testing of players

Pichot resigns from World Rugby after election defeat

LONDON: Agustin Pichot is to resign from the World Rugby Council following his narrow defeat to Bill Beaumont for the chairmanship of the sport's governing body, he announced yesterday.

The 45-year-old former Argentina captain lost by just five votes (28-23) to incumbent Beaumont despite entering the race relatively late.

Pichot said he would also be resigning from all of his other administrative roles in the sport. "As of today, I have decided not to continue as a UAR rep-

US gymnastics calls off 2020 national championships

WASHINGTON: USA Gymnastics will not stage its national championships and other major events in 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic, the national sport governing body announced Tuesday.

The US Gymnastics Championships, which had been planned for June 4-7 at Fort Worth, Texas, will be staged in the same city on June 3-6, 2021.

Reigning world and Olympic champion Simone Biles would have been favored next month to capture her seventh national all-around crown in eight seasons, missing out only in 2017 when she took a year off after the Rio

Olympics. But with the deadly virus outbreak forcing postponement of the Tokyo Olympics from July to 2021 and stay-in-place regulations in many areas, USA Gymnastics decided to cancel 2020 events after consulting with athletes and medical officials.

"In light of recent guidance from health experts, and after receiving feedback from our athletes and coaches, we believe it is in the best interest of our community to wait until 2021 to hold premier events," USA Gymnastics chief executive officer Li Li Leung said.

USA Gymnastics said it remains in the process of rescheduling other events ahead of the 2021 Tokyo Olympics, including the US Olympic trials and the USA Gymnastics Championships for rhythmic and trampoline, with plans to announce those dates "in the coming weeks." USA Gymnastics will stage its 2020 national congress and tradeshow as a virtual event. Also postponed was the US Classic meet at Hartford, Connecticut, which was planned for May 23, 2020, but will instead be contested May 22, 2021 in the same city. — AFP