



12 Coronavirus widens climate rift between Europe, US oil majors



15 India's 'superfood' jackfruit goes global



20 Leaders Bayern brush Union aside on Bundesliga return



Ramadan KAREEM

Fajr	03:23
Dhuhr	11:44
Asr	15:20
Maghrib	18:35
Isha	20:03



Jail for 3 months, KD 5,000 fine for not wearing masks

MPs submit law to nationalize oil jobs • Audit Bureau explains virus contracts



KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem speaks during a meeting with the Audit Bureau on Sunday to examine government contracts during the coronavirus crisis. — KUNA

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The health ministry said yesterday that people who fail to wear facemasks or anything that covers their mouth and nose face tough punishment of up to three months in jail and a fine not exceeding KD 5,000 or one of the two penalties. The health ministry made wearing a mask mandatory when people leave home after it recommended to the Cabinet to impose a total curfew in the country until May 30.

The total curfew will be evaluated on Wednesday, according to Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah. Kuwait has seen a sharp rise in the number of coronavirus cases in the past couple of weeks, mainly among Indians, Kuwaitis, Egyptians and Bangladeshis. The rise in cases could be attributed to the fact that the ministry has launched an active surveillance campaign to test more people.

Five MPs yesterday submitted a draft law calling on the oil sector to nationalize all jobs within six months and appoint expats only if necessary and for one year. The bill filed by MPs Al-Humaidi Al-Subaei, Bader Al-Mulla, Saleh Ashour, Abdulkarim Al-Kandari and Faisal Al-Kandari requires Kuwait Petroleum Corp (KPC) and all its subsidiaries to commit to turn over all jobs to Kuwaitis within six months from the date of passing this legislation.

It also calls for not renewing contracts of consulting companies. Employment must be made following the publication of advertisements and priority must be given to Kuwaitis and then to children of Kuwaiti women married to foreigners. If no one applied for the jobs, oil companies can then appoint expats for just one year, which can be renewed.

The Kuwaiti oil sector, which generates almost 90 percent of public revenues, employs around 15,000 Kuwaitis and several thousand expats. But a larger number of expats work at oil companies through contractors, who have long-term deals to supply manpower. The new draft law follows another filed two days ago calling to dismiss all expats in government jobs and replacing them with Kuwaitis. The bill requires all ministries and government departments to complete the process within one year.

Minister of State for Municipality Affairs Waleed Al-Jassem issued a decision at the weekend to stop the appointment of expats at the Municipality and start a process to terminate the services of all expat employees and replace them with Kuwaitis. The decision was warmly welcomed by several lawmakers, who said the decision should be applied by other public sector agencies. MP Omar Al-Tabtabaei meanwhile said he and a group of lawmakers will

Continued on Page 16

News in brief

Khamenei slams US

TEHRAN: Iran's supreme leader said Sunday that the US will be expelled from Iraq and Syria. The US "will not be staying either in Iraq or Syria and must withdraw and will certainly be expelled", said Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. "Even the leaders of some of America's allies... abhor American statesmen and government, do not trust them and are indifferent towards them," he added, claiming this was due to what he called the US' "warmongering, helping notorious governments, training terrorists, unconditional support for the Zionist regime's increasing oppression and their recent awful management of the coronavirus" pandemic. — AFP

Pregnant doc dies of virus

ALGIERS: The death of a pregnant Algerian doctor from the COVID-19 disease after she was denied maternity leave has sparked an uproar and prompted the dismissal Sunday of a hospital director. Health Minister Abderrahman Benbouzid sacked the director of the Ras El Oued hospital in eastern Algeria after Wafa Boudissa succumbed to COVID-19. The 28-year-old doctor was eight months pregnant and worked at the IC surgery unit of the hospital when she died on Friday. She had asked the hospital chief for early maternity leave, but he refused to let her take any time off. — AFP

Syria tycoon lashes out again

DAMASCUS: Syrian tycoon Rami Makhlouf on Sunday accused the regime of threatening to arrest him and close his telecommunications empire if he does not hand over profits. Makhlouf, a first cousin of Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad, made the latest accusations against the Damascus government in a 16-minute Facebook video – his third recorded diatribe since April. The head of Syria's largest mobile operator, Syriatel, has been embroiled in a power struggle with the Assad government since last summer when authorities seized his Al-Bustan charity and dissolved militias affiliated to him. — AFP

Deaths from virus symptoms surge in Aden

ADEN: Deaths in Aden have surged to at least five times higher than normal, an NGO and medics say, igniting fears that the coronavirus is spreading unhindered in the Yemeni port city. Six years of war against the Houthis – and a widening fault-line among forces opposed to that rebel outfit – have left authorities ill-equipped to control the spread of the virus.

The first coronavirus case in Aden,

the government's interim capital, was only recorded about a month ago. But since then, the total number of deaths registered in the city has "increased seven-fold", according to Saddam Al-Haidari, a physician at a public hospital. Hospitals have stopped admitting patients with symptoms of the COVID-19 disease caused by the novel coronavirus in recent days, several health sources told AFP, since they are not equipped to deal with the virus.

Many doctors in Aden have deserted their posts because they don't have access to protective gear, these sources added, while several hospitals have even closed down, according to Save the Children.

Continued on Page 16

Sleepless nights for gravedigger

NEW DELHI: Death had not fazed gravedigger Mohammed Shamim up to now, but since the grip of the coronavirus crisis has tightened in New Delhi, a shiver runs up even his spine each time he sees a hearse pull up at the cemetery he tends. "I've been burying the dead for the last two decades. But until now, I've never

been scared for my own life," he said. The Indian capital has become one of the country's COVID-19 hotspots, with media reports based on graveyard records saying there are 450 dead – triple the official tally.

Shamim says he alone has dug graves for 115 bodies at the cemetery's designated area for coronavirus dead, about 200 m away from the others. Despite the third-generation gravedigger's experience, his family has now started complaining about his job at the Jadid Qabristan Ahle Muslim cemetery, and Shamim has moved his four daughters to his

Continued on Page 16

'Kiss and go': Back to school for NZ kids

WELLINGTON: Hundreds of thousands of New Zealand children returned to school yesterday after two months of home education as part of a COVID-19 lockdown. Excited youngsters greeted classmates for the first time in eight weeks, while teachers reinforced messages about social distancing and hand-washing to com-

bat the coronavirus. Education Minister Chris Hipkins said the return to a noisy, bustling environment would be a "culture shock" after a challenging period for both children and parents.

"Our message is it's safe to send kids back to school, we want kids back at school and catching up with any learning that they've lost during the lockdown," he told reporters. New Zealand, with a population of five million, has recorded 1,149 coronavirus cases and just 21 deaths, with its success largely attributed to a strict lockdown imposed in late March.

Continued on Page 16



ADEN: Yemenis shop at a street market in the Crater district of this southern coastal city on Sunday, amid fears that coronavirus is spreading unhindered in the city. — AFP



NEW DELHI: In this photograph taken on May 10, 2020, gravedigger Mohammed Shamim instructs relatives of a COVID-19 victim during the burial at a graveyard. — AFP



WELLINGTON: Schoolchildren make their way to school after the government allowed schools to re-open yesterday. — AFP

Local

Volunteers deliver groceries, help frontliners during crisis

Thousands of young Kuwaitis volunteered in co-ops around Kuwait

In My View

Taking care of our heroes

By Sadie Hussain

Recent circumstances have finally shed light on the fact that some job functions are far more high risk than others. With millions of healthcare workers frontlining the battle against the pandemic, a number of related deaths are rising worldwide and more recently in Kuwait.

Alongside the inevitably higher risk of being exposed to sick patients, healthcare workers are head to head with the virus that we are all hiding from and therefore juggling with the added pressure of the pandemic related stressors that we are all facing.

It is terribly frightening to be on the frontline, treating a new and potentially deadly contagious disease that carries so much uncertainty. Aside from the fear of the unknown, there are many challenges that are being forced on our key workers that we fail to notice.

Whilst the consistent use of PPE reduces the risk of becoming infected, PPE is in dire shortage in many places worldwide and therefore healthcare workers are struggling to carry out their functions in inadequate environments that include the shortage of medical equipment such as ventilators and ICU beds. This is saddled with the unusually high and increasing demand to work longer hours.

The ever changing health recommendations and constant developments surrounding the nature and extent of the virus add the strain of keeping informed, with little to no time granted to absorb the information, contents of which are equally distressing.

And if the adversity of the challenges mentioned above were not already onerous, the worry of carrying the virus home and passing it to loved ones is yet another predicament being faced by many.

Balancing the overarching duty to help others, which for many led them to the profession, battles against the understandable commitment to protect themselves and loved ones. Healthcare workers are having to make enormously distressing and morally challenging decisions.

It would be discourteous not to acknowledge the burden that is being carried by our devoted warriors, a burden that is being carried for the whole world - it all takes a toll.

Whilst it will take time until the mental health toll of the Pandemic is fully understood, early data such as the study conducted by the medical journal JAMA and published on March 23 reported that amongst the approximate 1,257 healthcare workers on the frontline in China, 50.4 percent reported symptoms of depression, 44.6 percent reported symptoms of anxiety, 34 percent reported symptoms of insomnia and an estimated 71.5 percent reported symptoms of distress.

The most common root to these symptoms are the intense negative pressures including "moral injury" suffered by the individuals facing the pandemic head on. A term that originated in the military, "moral injury" is defined as the psychological distress resulting from either the actions or lack of, that violate an individual's moral or ethical code. The conflict of aligning personal and professional commitments unsurprisingly fall within this form of distress and are exacerbated further by the bolstering psychological resilience, esteem, outlook and values after these healthcare workers are being exposed to these highly challenging situations.

The post-traumatic growth of our healthcare workers is at peril. Without our frontline heroes, the Kuwait healthcare system would collapse and it is therefore vital that early steps are taken to mitigate this.

Countless studies have highlighted the importance that a good support system can play in influencing and easing the stresses that contribute to these conditions.

We must stifle the seed of moral injury and prepare now in supporting our heroes with the moral dilemmas they are facing. Some steps that can be taken include:

- Offering healthcare staff with a full and frank assessment of what they will face on the frontline, without any understatement;

- Keeping a close eye on presentism, not only does this affect operational capability but the signs of working less effectively are often an early indication of poor mental health and may be addressed more affectively;

- Setting up a remote forum for staff of all backgrounds to discuss the emotional and social challenges being faced, this will enable team leaders to offer direct support and advice to help their staff work through some of the issues being faced; and

- Ensuring that once the crisis recedes ongoing care is being offered.

Despite some of the remarkable stories celebrating the bravery, strength and dedication of our healthcare workers, it is apparent that the fiasco is the result of poor planning and the failure to factor in contingencies which should be prepared for, from now.



KUWAIT: In this May 8, 2020 file photo, a volunteer organizes a queue inside a co-op society in Kuwait. — Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Volunteers have played a key role in supporting Kuwait during the coronavirus crisis. From the beginning of the crisis, thousands of people registered to volunteer with the civil defense, co-ops, for delivering food and supplies to those in need and in other ways to support those working on the frontline all over Kuwait.

Thousands of young Kuwaitis have volunteered in co-ops around the country. Until May 10, co-ops were delivering groceries to people at home, but stopped this service due to a decision from the Co-op Union once the full curfew came into effect. The union said this decision was made because some co-ops don't have enough facilities to provide this service. Also, many did not have permits for being outside during the curfew. Omar Dashti, a Kuwaiti volunteer, used his own vehicle to help deliver groceries and medicines from co-ops and pharmacies. He has called on the union to resume delivery services. "Many people are scared of becoming infected by the coronavirus, especially after so many cases of infection inside co-ops. So they prefer home delivery, which also reduces crowds at the co-op. Also, elderly and disabled people face difficulty reaching the co-op, so this delivery service is necessary for them," Dashti told Kuwait Times.

“Volunteering is a national duty”

He is a civilian employee at the ministry of interior, and with a national holiday declared over this crisis, he doesn't go to work. "So I decided to volunteer in delivering the needs of consumers. I registered since the first day of the partial curfew on March 22, and have been delivering for all co-ops around Kuwait. After stopping the delivery services from co-ops on May 10, we are now delivering for pharmacies," Dashti said.

"I work with the Amerni Limousine Company, which provides their vehicles along with drivers to deliver the needs of consumers free of charge. Now we only deliver from pharmacies, mostly Royal Pharmacy, as they have over 50 operational branches. Demand is very high on the pharmacies, and operators cannot even take all the calls. As they don't have a delivery service, they depend on us," he explained.

Dashti also distributes water at police checkpoints in different areas and sanitizers to those working on the frontlines. "I consider volunteering a national duty. My colleagues, the officers, are working during this crisis, so I feel it's necessary to support them and help through my volunteering. I hope that the co-op delivery service will return soon, especially since there are many people who just returned from outside and they are under home quarantine and can't leave the house," concluded Dashti.

Coronavirus in Kuwait: What we know so far

KUWAIT: Kuwait has recorded 14,850 cases infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) as of Saturday, in addition to 112 deaths. With the exception of 168 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 thousands have been discharged from quarantine after exhibiting no symptoms during their 14-day quarantine period, the Ministry of Health confirmed. Meanwhile, 4,339 people have recovered completely after previously being infected with the virus, while there are 10,399 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

In My View

After corona



By Abdellatif Sharaa

local@kuwaittimes.com

'Life Goes On' is the title of a publication by the GCC Health Council with a hashtag in Arabic #return after corona. The booklet starts by saying "life goes on", a title that spells optimism, but to reach safety we must comply with instructions and advice that makes the return to normal life after coronavirus safer and easier.

It is really encouraging to have these types of publications that send assurances that the virus will not stay with us for long, but this requires all kind of efforts by all authorities as well as the public to cooperate to cleanse the earth from this disease in its current form and remove its claws that are affecting every aspect of life now.

The booklet asks that we continue preventive behavior as a way of life. This is really important and should be followed in full whether with coronavirus or not, such as getting enough sleep, eating healthy food and being physically active - any form of activity is acceptable, even walking. It also calls for educating oneself on how to deal with diseases and contribute to protect ourselves and the society from it, and it reminds us to be keen on getting the necessary vaccinations.

When one feels sick, especially if it has to do with the respiratory system, they should seek medical help. If healthy, keep on with your life normally and follow instructions. The booklet alludes to returning to using public transportation, particularly buses and taxis, and gives instructions to passengers. It also mentions measures when you drive your private car, when markets reopen, and gatherings and going to parks will be allowed. It tells restaurant owners, workers and patrons what to do to avoid infections.

An important area is returning to work in offices. It gives the employer advice and reminders on rules and offers the employee guidelines that should be followed when reporting to work. The publication did not leave schools and universities out, as instructions were given to those responsible for the facilities and their students.

Another tradition was also alluded to in the booklet - travelling abroad - which is something everybody is waiting for after the long period of lockdowns and curfews. It is a good effort for sure that focuses on what I will do tomorrow, God willing.

"When you arise in the morning, think of what precious privilege it is to be alive - to breathe, to think, to enjoy, to love." — Anon

needed to the following numbers:

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

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

Mental health assistance

The Kuwait Psychological Association (KPA) is providing consultation through the phone for people suffering from the psychological impacts of coronavirus. Different doctors are working on the hotline in different timings as follows:
Dr Rashed Al-Sahl: on Monday and Wednesday 10:00 am - 1:00 pm. Call 9797-6168.
Dr Fahad Al-Tasha: daily from 8:00 pm - 12:00 am. Call 9904-8258.
Dr Othman Al-Asfour: daily 5:00 pm - 8:00 pm. Call 9938-5350.
Dr Mohammed Al-Khaldi (head of this team): daily 9:00 am - 12:00 pm. Call 9903-6470.
Dr Ahmad Al-Khaldi: daily 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm. Call 9910-7965.
Dr Munera 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

Kuwait must focus on economic reform post-COVID-19, says GlobalData

Priority to accelerating diversification, private investment, new industries

KUWAIT: Hugely dependent on its oil export revenues for economic growth, the impact of oil prices below \$20 a barrel in April 2020 placed immense pressure on Kuwait's finances, with the country's fiscal deficit set to rise to 11.1 percent of GDP in 2020, along with rising debt and depletion of its financial reserves. Once it is through the COVID-19 health crisis, Kuwait's highest priority should be to accelerate its New Kuwait Vision 2035 diversification and structural economic reform program to bring private investment and new job-creating industries into the country, says GlobalData, a leading data and analytics company.



**Deficit
11.1% of
GDP**

Richard Thompson, Editorial Director GlobalData, comments: "With \$288 billion of projects planned or underway, there is no shortage of potential opportunities in Kuwait. The country's challenge is delivery. Sadly, for contractors, businesses and the economy at large, very little of what is planned is being brought to tender or contract award. As a result, the country's projects market has declined every year since 2015, in terms of the value of project contract awards.

"In 2020, several major active oil schemes are due to be completed, including the \$12 billion Clean Fuels Project, which was set to complete in April, and the

\$16 billion Al-Zour refinery, which should become partially operational in June. However, the completion of these projects will leave a vacuum in the oil sector, as there are no equivalent schemes in the pipeline that act meaningfully as a replacement."

Outside the oil and gas sector, Kuwait Authority for Partnership Projects (KAPP) is eager to move forward with its programme of privately financed PPP projects. Kuwait's banks appreciate the need for greater participation by local institutions in PPP projects, and increasingly see the positives in committing to long-term local project finance.

Thompson continues: "Whether the stumbling block is at a ministerial, parliamentary or lower level, Kuwait increasingly needs decisive government action, and far swifter implementation, moving forward if it is to achieve its socio-economic objectives.

"Despite having one of the world's largest sovereign wealth funds, Kuwait persistently struggles to progress key infrastructure and development schemes because of schisms between the government and its elected parliament. The lack of cohesion between the two, exacerbated by often-bureaucratic procurement processes, is hampering the country's ability to make progress on important projects.



"Most of Kuwait's planned projects include urgently needed infrastructure developments, following more than a decade of underspending. To expedite the process, the government launched its ambitious

New Kuwait Vision 2035 investment strategy. But for the plan to succeed, it is imperative for Kuwait to figure out how to bypass the roadblocks that have prevented progress in the past."



KUWAIT: Egyptian nationals, including those without a residency visa and others wishing to return back home, arrive at Kuwait International Airport to board three flights that headed to Egypt on Sunday. — Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh

News in brief

40 co-op staff test positive

KUWAIT: Kaifan Co-op Society announced that after 250 employees had a medical check-up, 40 of them tested positive for coronavirus. The central market and all branches will be closed for sterilization. Meanwhile, Al-Nuzha co-op announced that one of its employees, Tikki Sherangout Abd Al-Ashraf, died after he was diagnosed with coronavirus.

246 recoveries

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Health announced yesterday the recovery of 246 cases from coronavirus, raising the number of total recoveries to 4339.

Curfew violators

KUWAIT: Ministry of Interior arrested 15 curfew violators on Sunday, including 12 Kuwaitis and three expats. The arrests took place as follows: Six in the Capital governorate, five in Hawally, two in Jahra and two in Al-Ahmadi.

Offender arrested

KUWAIT: Police arrested a resident in Kuwait who offended a Gulf country and its royals in a tweet. The suspect, who works for a cleaning company, confessed that he posted the offensive tweet. The Ministry of Interior affirmed that anyone trying to offend any country will be facing legal ac-

Eidiya online

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait launched an online service called '3edeti' to allow people to send and use Eidiya for online shopping.

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed

Kuwait Times
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The First Daily in the Arabian Gulf



Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Pigeons feed on food and water left for birds on a roundabout in Salmiya. — Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

National Guard secure commodities' needs for Al-Nuzha district residents

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KUWAIT: The National Guard have taken task of running Al-Nuzha cooperative store to ensure work continuity after its closure due to infections with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). The National Guard said in a statement on Sunday the personnel took charge of operating Al-Nuzha store after succeeding in managing branches of Al-Khaldiya and Al-Mahboula cooperative societies. Brigadier Riad Mohammad Tawari, the Guard Assistant for Financial Affairs and Resource Management, said the squad would manage and

operate the store to secure basic needs and commodities for the district residents. Customers can shop by using the telephone, the barcode system and the website. They will be able to get the purchased items at the parking lot. The bought goods can also be delivered at houses of the elderly and the incapable. A team of the Guard chemical and radiation monitoring center has already sanitized Al-Nuzha shopping store. Al-Nuzha district, situated in the heart of the Capital Governorate, is populated by some 10,000 people. — KUNA

IICO inaugurates Sabah Al-Ahmad village in north Syria

KUWAIT: The International Islamic Charitable Organization (IICO) inaugurated the city of Sabah Al-Ahmad Charity in the northern Syrian region to accommodate the displaced. IICO inaugurated Kuwait Village with a generous donation from His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, as part of its humanitarian programs to reduce the difficult conditions for most of the vulnerable Syrian

refugee families. In a press statement, IICO Chairman Dr Abdullah Al-Maaloq said Sunday that the opening of this village represents a first stage of the construction of the city project that includes 1,800 economic houses, health, educational and service facilities, in cooperation with Sham Al-Khair Association. Maatouq stressed that this generous donation from His Highness the Amir is a good initiative that adds to His Highness' record of humanitarian initiatives, tenders, donor conferences and relief villages. He also expressed his sincere thanks for His Highness the Amir in appreciation and recognition of his great pioneering humanitarian role, which he embodied during an extended and full march to work and to help the afflicted in various parts of the world and alleviate their suffering due to conflicts, wars and natural disasters. — KUNA

Local

Kuwait Heritage



KUWAIT: Al-Ardha, or 'Dance of War,' is considered one of the inherited traditions of the Arabian desert known to the people of the Arab Peninsula and the Gulf. It is now performed during most events and national celebrations. Performers dance to drum beats while swinging their raised swords and singing nationalist songs. (Source: A total of commemorative printed images to the Ministry of Information in the 1960s and 1970s. Researched by Mohammed Zakaria Abu El-Ella, Researcher in Heritage, the Ministry of Information)

Living COVID-19 in turbid 2020

By Mariam-Joyce DSouza

Under the pleasant norms of everyday-life, beneath the veneer of culture and civilization, one of the bitterest and most sadistic intangible wars of modern history, is being fought – the battle against COVID-19.

Who would have thought that we – the children of the 21st century – would be living under 'lock-down'; having 12-hour curfews, rationing onions and potatoes for lunch, being afraid to drive out in the streets, deciding between a dish of plain pasta with just a hint (literally) of basil or a bowl of steamed, white, long-grained basmati rice with a dash of tomato ketchup, not being able to taste that first sip of a piping-hot chai-karak or inhale the aroma of a double-shot espresso, to begin the day! Talking about 'day' – day is night, and night is day, all jumbled-up into one relentless existence.

Some might say that life during COVID-19 is becoming tiresome and unpleasant. If you do not die from the horrible symptoms of the disease, then starving to death could be a likely possibility. All in all, it is a surreal experience. A bizarre turn of events. A colossal loss of lives. Our days are filled

with idle tots, nights with morbid thoughts. When is that ray of sunshine going to peak out of the clouds? When indeed!

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Islamic news agencies main source for facts

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KUNA chief has affirmed that he has been in continuous contact with various State apparatuses and institutions to obtain information from main and authentic sources. Moreover, it has contributed to transmitting international news from main sources and covered with professionalism and credibility events in various States. Moreover, he added, the Kuwaiti news agency has covered and publicized contacts that have been conducted by the state with various states and international organizations for fighting the pandemic. He prayed to His Almighty for relieving human race of the pandemic that has spread horror and inflicted damage and losses throughout the globe. — KUNA

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The film's poster.



From the film camp in Lebanon.

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Further, Henayyan added that his relation with cinema started through LAPA workshops after which he started writing scripts and directing them. "We produced four films through the workshop and then my film won the award at the FAD festival organized by LAPA last December," he noted.

Commenting on the movie camp organized by LAPA in collaboration with LOYAC Lebanon, media figure Nadia Ahmed said: "This is the fourth version of the film industry camp; two were held in Kuwait and two in Lebanon through which we focus on nurturing new talented movie makers. Participants' numbers and levels have been improving and increasing in writing, directing, editing and photography. We aspire to train all young talents and produce short films."

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youth are eager to study cinema. She added that ALGA'AILA film attracted attention and won the first award in the last camp. "Henayyan is an ambitious young Kuwaiti director and his film talks about an old Kuwaiti myth about 'Hemarat Algailah,'" she said. "The fact that the film was nominated for an international festival reflects the success of LAPA movies camps."

"I studied cinema in South California University and applied the same training methodology for five months in LAPA to provide trainees with professional levels equal to Masters degrees as if they have already travelled and studied there," Ahmed explained, adding that LOYAC helps young trainees attend international festivals and communicate with international platform like Netflix to gain more experience and have access to a larger audience.

Local

Kuwait Heritage



KUWAIT: Al-Ardha, or 'Dance of War,' is considered one of the inherited traditions of the Arabian desert known to the people of the Arab Peninsula and the Gulf. It is now performed during most events and national celebrations. Performers dance to drum beats while swinging their raised swords and singing nationalist songs. (Source: A total of commemorative printed images to the Ministry of Information in the 1960s and 1970s. Researched by Mohammed Zakaria Abu El-Ella, Researcher in Heritage, the Ministry of Information)

Living COVID-19 in turbid 2020

By Mariam-Joyce DSouza

Under the pleasant norms of everyday-life, beneath the veneer of culture and civilization, one of the bitterest and most sadistic intangible wars of modern history, is being fought – the battle against COVID-19.

Who would have thought that we – the children of the 21st century – would be living under 'lock-down'; having 12-hour curfews, rationing onions and potatoes for lunch, being afraid to drive out in the streets, deciding between a dish of plain pasta with just a hint (literally) of basil or a bowl of steamed, white, long-grained basmati rice with a dash of tomato ketchup, not being able to taste that first sip of a piping-hot chai-karak or inhale the aroma of a double-shot espresso, to begin the day! Talking about 'day' – day is night, and night is day, all jumbled-up into one relentless existence.

Some might say that life during COVID-19 is becoming tiresome and unpleasant. If you do not die from the horrible symptoms of the disease, then starving to death could be a likely possibility. All in all, it is a surreal experience. A bizarre turn of events. A colossal loss of lives. Our days are filled

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Afghan president, rival Abdullah sign power-sharing deal

WHO are you? WHO in 5 snapshots



NEW DELHI: Gravedigger Mohammed Shamim (right) instructs the relatives of a COVID-19 coronavirus victim before the burial at a graveyard in New Delhi. —AFP

India's coronavirus cases rise

Government extends nationwide lockdown

NEW DELHI: India extended its coronavirus lockdown until the end of May on Sunday as it reported its biggest single-day jump in cases, but said some sectors would be permitted to open up to ease the economic pain. The lockdown affecting 1.3 billion people - the world's largest - has been in force since late March and has been devastating for India's poor, with millions of migrant workers losing their jobs.

"Lockdown measures to contain the spread of COVID-19 will continue" until at least May 31, the home affairs ministry said in a statement. Schools, places of worship, shopping malls, cinemas and gyms must remain closed, the ministry said, and bans on large gatherings for religious and sporting events will be extended. City metro train services and domestic and international air travel will remain suspended, it said. A night curfew restricting public movement, except for essential services, will be kept in place between 7:00 pm and 7:00 am.

Restaurants however will now be allowed to operate their kitchens for takeaway services. Sports complexes and stadiums are permitted to host events - but without spectators. Inter-state and intra-state buses and passenger vehicles were authorised to operate, but with the discretion of states and territories. The National Disaster Management Authority said the restrictions would be updated "as necessary, keeping in view the need to open up economic activities" in Asia's third-biggest economy while containing the virus. "India will not see the worst of COVID-19, like in other countries," Health Minister Harsh Vardhan tweeted, adding that state governments had the flexi-

bility to implement locally tailored measures.

Cases on the rise

The third extension to the lockdown came as India recorded its biggest single-day jump in cases with 4,987 new infections in the last 24 hours. It took the total number of cases to 90,927 with 2,872 deaths. Health experts say infections may only peak in June or July, and have called for more testing to determine the spread of the disease. Earlier Sunday, India's worst-affected coronavirus state Maharashtra, home to the



Biggest single-day jump with 4,987 new infections

financial capital Mumbai, extended its lockdown to end-May ahead of the national announcement. Maharashtra, with a population of 112 million, has reported 30,706 cases including 1,135 deaths. Mumbai - India's worst-hit city - has 18,555 infections, and the pandemic has pushed its hospitals to breaking point.

A city authority spokesman said Mumbai was con-

overwhelmed hospitals.

Businesses including restaurants, bars, cafes, hairdressers, and stores will be allowed to re-open. Gyms, pools, cinemas and theatres are allowed to open on May 25. Spain is also set to further ease its lockdown measures, while Germany has already taken several steps towards a reopening, including the resumption of its top football league - but with empty stadiums. There was other welcome relief for Europeans on the weekend too, with people enjoying beaches in France, Greece and Italy, and Britons going to parks to bask in the sun.

S America, Africa hit hard

Despite the optimism in parts of Europe, the deadly pandemic remains on the march having claimed more than 315,000 lives, with worrying data from South America and Africa offering a reminder of the severity of the crisis. Deaths in Brazil have risen sharply in recent days, and with more than 241,000 infections reached over the weekend, South America's largest country now has the fourth-highest caseload in the world. But President Jair Bolsonaro has been a staunch opponent of lockdowns, claiming they have unnecessarily hurt the Brazilian economy, but experts and regional leaders have warned that the healthcare infrastructure could collapse.

The far-right leader alongside several ministers greeted hundreds of his supporters in the capital Brasilia on Sunday in defiance of social distancing measures, telling the crowd that the virus restrictions were too much. Latin America and the Caribbean have recorded more than half a million infections, with almost half of them from Brazil, and there is growing alarm about the impact of the virus on the least privileged in the region. Ecuador reported the first COVID-19 case in one of its indigenous Amazon tribes, deepening the crisis in one of South America's hardest-hit countries. Rights groups in Nicaragua have

considered turning Wankhede Stadium - the site of India's cricket World Cup final triumph in 2011 - into a virus treatment facility. The conversion could happen if other facilities get overwhelmed with the onset of the monsoon, which usually starts around mid-June - and monsoon-related illnesses, although "nothing has been decided yet", the spokesman said. There were some nationwide relaxations for industry and agriculture last month, while offices last week were allowed to operate with one-third capacity. Limited service resumed today on the country's massive rail network.

'Growth prospects remain weak'

The dire economic situation has sparked a migrant worker crisis, as many businesses shut down when the lockdown was imposed. Jobless and hungry, many migrants fled the cities, some walking hundreds of kilometres. Dozens have lost their lives to accidents or exhaustion. Some of those stranded in urban areas have also clashed with police in a recent spate of protests as they clamored to be allowed to return home to their villages.

On Sunday, five policeman and a journalist were injured in Rajkot city of western Gujarat state after up to 3,000 migrant workers clashed with officers when a special train to bring them home was cancelled. Twenty-nine people were arrested. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman this week announced several stimulus measures, although analysts said they focused on easing the supply side of the economy. "Near to medium-term growth prospects remain weak in the absence of demand boosts," Kotak Mahindra Bank senior economist Upasna Bhardwaj said in a note. —AFP

Israel swears in a unity govt, eyes West Bank

JERUSALEM: Israel's parliament swore in a new unity government on Sunday led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his former rival Benny Gantz, ending the longest political crisis in the nation's history. After more than 500 days without a stable government and three inconclusive elections, lawmakers in the 120-seat parliament approved a three-year coalition, with 73 voting for and 46 against. One member was absent.

The new government was set to confront serious crises in its first weeks, including the economic devastation wrought by the coronavirus and a looming battle over Israel's possible annexation of large parts of the occupied West Bank. Addressing the parliament, or Knesset, before the vote, Netanyahu said his incoming government should apply Israeli sovereignty over Jewish West Bank settlements. "It's time to apply the Israeli law and write another glorious chapter in the history of Zionism," Netanyahu said.

Such a move is seen as likely to cause international uproar and inflame tensions in the West Bank, home to nearly three million Palestinians and some 400,000 Israelis living in settlements considered illegal under international law. Netanyahu told the chamber that annexation "won't distance us from peace, it will bring us closer". The coalition government was agreed last month between veteran right-wing leader Netanyahu and the centrist Gantz, a former army chief. Plans had been set for an inauguration last Thursday, but Netanyahu asked for three more days to decide on cabinet assignments among his Likud party loyalists.

West Bank annexations?

Under the coalition deal, Netanyahu will serve as prime minister for the coming 18 months - a major victory for a leader due to stand trial in a week on corruption charges, which he denies. Gantz will be alternate prime minister, a new position in Israeli governance, for the first half of the deal. He and Netanyahu will swap roles on November 17, 2021. Russian President Vladimir Putin congratulated Israel on its new government, saying he hoped for a continued "policy of strengthening friendly ties and mutually beneficial cooperation" between the countries. US top diplomat Mike Pompeo welcomed the swearing-in announcement in a tweet. "We are extremely fortunate to have such strong and experienced partners in Jerusalem," he said.

The Netanyahu-Gantz deal says the government can from July 1 initiate moves to implement US President Donald Trump's controversial peace plan for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The plan, rejected by the Palestinians, gives the green light from Washington for Israel to annex Jewish settlements and other territory in the West Bank. Some experts warn that Jordan may back away from its historic 1994 peace deal with Israel if the Jewish state tries to annex the strategically crucial Jordan Valley border region. Speaking to German magazine Der Spiegel days ago, Jordan's King Abdullah II said: "If Israel really annexes the West Bank in July, it would lead to a massive conflict with the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan." —AFP

More easing in Europe; Virus hits S America

ROME: Restaurants and churches reopened in Italy yesterday as part of a fresh wave of lockdown easing in Europe, but rising coronavirus death tolls in Brazil, South Africa and other parts of the world showed the worst is still to come in many countries. The relaxation of curbs in some places comes as governments around the world struggle to repair the vast economic damage unleashed by the pandemic, with Japan the latest to slump into a recession and the Fed warning of a severe US downturn as the global infection count topped 4.7 million.

But the World Health Organization has warned that reopening too quickly without a vaccine could trigger a second devastating wave of infections, and the body will host a virtual global health assembly this week to help chart a course out of the crisis. Once the worst-hit country in the world, Italy will take its latest step in a cautious, gradual return to normality, allowing businesses and churches to reopen after a two-month lockdown. "I share the joy of those communities who can finally reunite as liturgical assemblies, a sign of hope for all society."

Pope Francis said on Sunday during his live-streamed prayer, with Saint Peter's Basilica also throwing its door open to visitors. The Vatican, an independent enclave in the heart of Rome, has applied the same anti-virus measures as Italy, which imposed strict lockdowns after a dizzying rise in COVID-19 deaths and infections that



VATICAN: Nuns go through the security area across markings on the ground under the colonnades to access St Peter's Square Basilica yesterday in The Vatican during the lockdown aimed at curbing the spread of the COVID-19 infection. —AFP

accused the government of hiding the true number of COVID-19 cases by rushing burials.

Nicaraguan hospital staff have said the Nicaraguan health system is overwhelmed with patients suffering from respiratory illnesses, relatives say the bodies of loved ones are being carted off in pick-up trucks for "express burials" without their consent. There was also grim data in Africa, where the number of infections rose rapidly. South Africa on Sunday reported 1,160 new coronavirus infections, the highest daily number since the first case was recorded in March, taking the total to 15,515 - the highest on the continent. In Asia, India extended its lockdown - the world's biggest - to the end of May as it reported its biggest single-day jump in infections on Sunday. —AFP

International

France's death toll passes 28,000, virus hits abattoirs

Faithful flash car hazard lights for communion at mass

PARIS: Deaths from the new coronavirus in France passed 28,000 Sunday, the health ministry announced, as officials tried to contain outbreaks in two abattoirs. The latest daily toll, of 483, the largest in several weeks, was made up mainly of deaths in care homes: 429 deaths, compared to only 54 in hospital. Those numbers took France's total number of deaths from the virus to 28,108. France's health directorate, the DGS, was not able to tell AFP why there had been a sudden rise in the figures for deaths at care homes. The figures had been updated from those provided by the regional health authorities, they said. The figure for care home deaths have been corrected several times in recent days, reflecting the challenges officials face in collecting and collating the data.

Abattoir 'clusters'
Health officials meanwhile were battling to contain two outbreaks of the virus at abattoirs that are so far known to have infected around a hundred people. One abattoir is in the central Val de Loire region near the city of Orleans. The other is in the northwestern region of Brittany. Regional health officials said 63 of the 209 workers at the Breton slaughterhouse had so far tested positive for the virus. At the slaughterhouse in Fleury-les-Aubrais, near Orleans, officials there said they had detected a "cluster" of 34 cases among the 400 workers. Another 400 were tested on Sunday with others following on Tuesday.

"According to the company's human resources department, there were masks, gels, temperature readings at the entrance to the slaughterhouse and it seems that the protocol was followed," said regional prefect Pierre Pouessel. The overall picture in France, however, with a continuing fall in both hospi-

tal deaths and admissions for the virus, was better news. Four regions, in the north and the east of the country - including the Paris region - account for 74 percent of the number of people being treated in hospital. Since the virus arrived in France, 98,569 people have been hospitalized, of whom 17,500 had to be treated in intensive care. More than 61,000 have recovered and been allowed home.

Car hazard lights
Catholics in France's virus hit east on Sunday gathered for their first mass in weeks, praying and singing hymns from the relative safety of their cars. Some 500 believers gathered in Chalons-en-Champagne in about 200 cars parked at least a meter from one another outside the city's main exhibition hall. "It is a triumph of life," bishop Francois Touvet told AFP, adding that the initiative was a first for France and went ahead only after the authorities gave special permission.

It was held on the seventh day of a progressive easing of France's strict lockdown instituted in mid-March to brake the spread of the virus which has killed more than 28,000 people in France. Under new, looser regulations, people are allowed to leave their homes and travel up to 100 kilometers. But gatherings of more than 10 people remain prohibited as the country seeks to progressively get back to normal without unleashing a new infection wave. At Sunday's service in eastern France, hard hit by coronavirus, strict rules applied. Cars were checked at the entrance to ensure each occupant was wearing a mask and had access to virus-killing hand gel.

No more than four people were allowed per car, and no-one was allowed to get out. At the front of

and the economic capital Bujumbura.

Massacres, coups, war
Ethnic Hutus make up 85 percent of the population and Tutsis 14 percent. Tensions between Hutus and Tutsis have boiled over repeatedly since independence from former colonial power Belgium in 1962. In 1972 a failed Hutu-led uprising against the Tutsi-dominated leadership sparked a wave of massacres of Hutus, which left, according to different estimates, between 100,000 and 300,000 dead. In 1976 a military coup brought Jean-Baptiste Bagaza to power. In 1987 he was overthrown and Pierre Buyoya, another Tutsi military officer, became head of state. In 1988 new massacres left between 5,000, according to an official toll, and 50,000 dead. The assassination in 1993 of first Hutu president, Melchior Ndadaye, in a coup fomented by Tutsi soldiers triggered a civil war between the Tutsi-dominated army and Hutu rebels. The civil war lasted until 2006 despite several peace deals, notably one signed in Tanzania in 2000, several years before the two main rebel groups laid down arms. The war left nearly 300,000 dead, mainly civilians, and it ruined the economy.

Political crisis
Burundi, ruled since 2005 by former Hutu rebel chief Pierre Nkurunziza, has been mired in political crisis since he announced in 2015 that he would run for a third term. The opposition said this would violate the constitution and jeopardise deals ending

Rwanda's richest men - used his fortune and business empire to facilitate the killings. "Kabuga arrested, and arrested in France! It's a thunderbolt, quite extraordinary!" said Alain Gauthier, co-founder of the Collective of Civil Parties for Rwanda (CPCR).

For 23 years, Gauthier and his Franco-Rwandan wife Dafroza - who lost several members of her family in the genocide - have been gathering evidence against those they say are responsible. In 2001, they founded the CPCR to bring before the French courts anyone suspected of having taken part in the genocide and who, they say, often found refuge in France all too easily. The Gauthiers have given the courts information on some 30 suspects who have taken refuge in France, but only three cases have led to convictions, with the investigations often interminably slow to reach court.

France's dispute role in Rwanda
France's role before, during and after the genocide remains a matter of substantial controversy. One of the most fiercely disputed

dead since 2011 and displaced over 200,000, the Brussels-based research group said in a report released yesterday. "As security has deteriorated, the region has steadily come under the renewed influence of jihadist groups, which have also stepped up attacks on security forces," it said. "The spike in jihadist activity in the North West has raised fears that the region could soon become a land bridge connecting Islamic insurgencies in the central Sahel with the decade-old insurgency in the Lake Chad region of north-eastern Nigeria."

Nigeria has suffered from a 10-year conflict with fighters from the Boko Haram group and its splinter factions in the northeast of the country that has left over 36,000 people dead. Officials have during the past year sounded the alarm over signs of the growing jihadist influence among the numerous armed groups in the northwest. "Two Boko Haram offshoots are



PARIS: French policemen disperse people sitting on the stairs in front of Le Sacre Coeur in Paris on the first weekend after France eased lockdown measures taken to curb the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. —AFP

the car park, a pulpit complete with a cross and a statue of the Virgin Mary had been erected on a truck trailer, from where Touvet delivered his sermon over a microphone. At the foot of the stage, a dozen priests and deacons sat arranged in a semi-circle, their chairs carefully spaced a safe distance from each other. Worshippers who wished to receive communion were asked to switch on their car's hazard lights, and to clean their hands with sanitizing gel.

Priests wearing face masks, their hands also disinfected, then went around from car to car. "Clean

hands give the communion, clean hands receive it," said Touvet. "An exceptional measure for an exceptional situation." For Marie-Lorene, a 21-year-old resident of Chalons-en-Champagne, the mass was an opportunity to pray "for all those who have died of coronavirus for all those who fight against coronavirus and then for all the people who help the sick". Touvet told the faithful they would celebrate Pentecost together at the end of the month, either in church, "or here again", to worship "in this world wounded and overwhelmed by a small, invisible virus". —Agencies

Burundi: A poor country wracked by ethnic conflict

NAIROBI: The small, central African country of Burundi is one of the poorest in the world, with a history of political crises and ethnic massacres and a long civil war. Here are some key facts about the nation of 11 million people ahead of its May 20 first round presidential election.

Third poorest in world
Landlocked and situated in Africa's Great Lakes region, Burundi is one of the continent's smallest nations at 27,834 square kilometers (10,747 square miles), and one of its most densely populated. Green and fertile, it is nevertheless one of the three poorest countries in the world, with 75 percent of its population living below the poverty line, according to the World Bank. The UN's Food and Agriculture Organization estimates 1.7 million are in chronic severe food insecurity. Very mountainous, it often suffers from landslides. Farming forms the backbone of the economy, with coffee and tea employing 80 percent of the population and accounting for 40 percent of gross domestic product. Burundi has rare earth minerals essential to technological and military products. The political capital is Gitega

France a sought-after country for Rwandan genocide suspects

PARIS: The arrest of Felicien Kabuga, one of the last key fugitives wanted over the 1994 Rwandan genocide, in a suburb of Paris has raised some difficult questions for France. Those committed to getting justice for the genocide victims want to know how fugitives such as Kabuga find refuge in France - and why it took so long to track him down.

Kabuga, now 84, faces trial at an international tribunal after his arrest on Saturday. He is accused of being one of the organizers and financiers of the genocide carried out by ethnic Hutu extremists against Tutsis but also moderate Hutus between April and July 1994, in which at least 800,000 people were slaughtered. According to the UN indictment filed against him, Kabuga - once one of

Jihadist influence growing in volatile northwest Nigeria

LAGOS: Nigerian jihadist groups are gaining sway in the restive northwest and the region could become a "land bridge" to Islamists across the Sahel, the International Crisis Group warned yesterday. Northwestern Nigeria has been wracked by years of insecurity involving clashes between rival communities over land, attacks by heavily-armed criminal gangs and reprisal killings by vigilante groups.

The violence has left an estimated 8,000 people



GITEGA: A supporter holds a picture of Agathon Rwasa, presidential candidate of the main opposition party the National Congress for Liberty (CNL), during the last day of the campaign in Gitega, central Burundi. —AFP

the civil war. A clampdown on demonstrations and Nkurunziza's re-election that year failed to stem violence and massive rights abuses intensified. Around 1,200 were killed and more than 400,000 displaced up to May 2017, according to the International Criminal Court (ICC), which has launched an investigation into suspected crimes against humanity. In 2018 Nkurunziza surprised observers by announcing he would not stand in the forthcoming election. Burundi is listed 160th out of 180 countries for press freedom by Reporters Without Borders. —AFP

issues has been the military aid France gave to the regime of Rwandan president Juvenal Habyarimana, a Hutu, who ruled from 1973 until his April 1994 assassination, which triggered the genocide. In April last year, President Emmanuel Macron pledged to open the state archives on Rwanda from 1990 to 1994 to a committee of experts in a bid to help track down any suspects living in France. The committee is currently working on its report.

For Rwanda, one such person is Habyarimana's widow, Agathe. She has been accused of being a member of the inner circle of Hutus who planned and carried out the genocide. For Pierre Nsanzimana, who runs Ibuka France, a support group for survivors of the genocide, Kabuga's arrest is "really massive news". But that did not, he said, stop them asking questions about what protection Kabuga might have enjoyed - and how he could have been hiding out in France for so long. Florent Piton, a researcher at the University of Paris who specialises in Rwanda, has studied just this question. —AFP

making inroads into the region, where they are forging tighter relationships with aggrieved communities, herder-affiliated armed groups and criminal gangs," the report said.

One of the factions is an al-Qaeda linked outfit known as Ansaru that broke off from the main Boko Haram group in 2012 and was widely seen as dormant after being dismantled by security forces. The second splinter is the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), which has become a dominant force in the northeast of Nigeria after declaring allegiance to the Islamic State group in 2016. Both Ansaru and ISWAP have been sending supplies and clerics to the northwest and started claiming credit for attacks in the region, the report said. In a sign of Ansaru's growing menace the Nigerian police announced a major operation against the group in February in which it claimed to have killed 250 fighters. —AFP

News in brief

Nigeria seizes UK plane

LAGOS: Nigeria has seized a British plane for flouting a travel ban imposed as part of measures to curb the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, the aviation minister said Sunday. Flair Aviation, the airline involved, was authorized to conduct humanitarian flights but was caught operating commercial flights, Hadi Sirika said on his Twitter account. "This is callous!" he wrote. "The craft is impounded, the crew being interrogated. There shall be maximum penalty. Wrong time to try our resolve." There was no immediate reaction on Sunday from either the company or the British embassy on the matter. Nigeria has shut its airports and airspace since March to contain COVID-19, which has so far infected 5,621 people and claimed 176 lives there. —AFP

Iran deaths hit 6,988

TEHRAN: Iran said Friday it had recorded nearly 7,000 deaths from the novel coronavirus, warning of infection clusters in new regions after it partially eased lockdown measures. Health ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour said the COVID-19 illness had claimed a further 51 lives over 24 hours on Sunday. The ministry raised the overall death toll to 6,988 since Iran announced its first fatalities in the Shiite pilgrimage city of Qom in February. Jahanpour warned that cases were rising "in the province of Lorestan, and to some extent in Kermanshah, Sistan and Baluchistan". "Khuzestan province is still in a critical situation," he added. The southwestern province has become Iran's new coronavirus focal point, with the most critical "red" ranking on the country's colour-coded risk scale. It is the only region so far where authorities have reimposed business lockdowns after a country-wide relaxation in April. —AFP

Madagascar's virus death

ANTANANARIVO: Madagascar on Sunday announced the first death of a patient suffering from novel coronavirus, a 57-year-old hospital worker, nearly two months after the virus was first detected in the Indian Ocean island nation. The man who was a car park attendant at a hospital in the eastern city of Toamasina died on Saturday, professor Hanta Vololontiana, an official from the anti-coronavirus task team said. He had underlying diabetes and high blood pressure before he was infected. The island which has reported 304 cases has hit the headlines over a home-grown herbal concoction that President Andry Rajoelina claims can cure people infected with the virus. In an address to the nation on public television, Rajoelina said the patient was too sick to be administered with the herbal remedy. —AFP

Cuomo takes virus test

NEW YORK: New York Governor Andrew Cuomo on Sunday took a coronavirus test during his televised briefing and urged any fellow New Yorkers with symptoms or having been exposed to the virus to follow his example. "You don't have to be New York tough to take that test," he said during the live broadcast of his popular daily briefing. Cuomo's sometimes folksy and often informative briefings have been followed by thousands of viewers since New York emerged as a COVID-19 hotspot in the US, with more than 350,000 cases and more than 22,000 confirmed deaths. "You have to be smart, united, disciplined; you have to love yourself, your family, New Yorkers," he said, after a nurse in protective gown, mask and face shield had Cuomo close his eyes while she inserted a nasal swab to take a sample. "If I am not here tomorrow, that means I tested positive," the governor quipped. He has been tested several times previously, he said, but never before the public. —AFP

Local

Anthem bill sparks clashes in Hong Kong's legislature

Pro-Beijing lawmaker elected committee chairman

HONG KONG: Hong Kong's legislature plunged into chaotic scuffles for a second time this month, as pro-Beijing lawmakers yesterday took control of a key committee, paving the way for a debate on a bill that would criminalize abuse of China's national anthem. Pro-democracy legislators charged at security guards surrounding pro-establishment lawmaker Chan Kin-Por, who had taken the chairman's seat in the meeting against procedural objections by the opposition.

Guards hauled several legislators out of the chamber, some kicking and shouting. Some tried leaping over the guards from benches to take back the chairman's seat only to be forced back. The Democrats chanted "foul play" and held a placard reading "CCP (China Communist Party) tramples HK legislature."

Opposition lawmaker Ted Hui shouted at Chan that the meeting was "illegal." Even as the protests continued, Chan called a vote for a chairperson of the committee that was won by pro-Beijing lawmaker Starry Lee. Lee's camp condemned the violence and pledged to push ahead with the anthem bill. "It's painful to watch and it's saddening to see a legislative assembly degenerate into this level of behavior," pro-Beijing lawmaker Martin Liao said.

Beijing has accused the former British colony's pro-democracy lawmakers of "malicious" filibustering to prevent some proposed bills from going to a final vote, effectively paralyzing the legislature. It was the second time in 10 days that have legislators pushed and shoved each other over the procedures of electing a chairperson. Last May, scuffles broke out in the legislature over a proposed extradition bill

that if passed could have seen people stand trial in courts in mainland China. The bill sparked often-violent protests in the Hong Kong and was later scrapped. "They can take away the rules of procedures today but I am sure the Hong Kong people won't forget today," said Democratic lawmaker Dennis Kwok.

Online calls for protests

The house committee's role is to scrutinize bills before a second reading in the legislative council and has built up a backlog after failing to elect a chairperson since late last year. The backlog includes the China national anthem bill, which is expected to be given a second reading on May 27 despite the procedural chaos. Protesters have been calling on social media for city-wide demonstrations on that day. Liao acknowledged the bill could spark social unrest. "We cannot shun our legislative duty because we think there's a risk," he said. Social distancing amid the pandemic has largely put a brake on protests since January, but demonstrations are expected to resume later this year with the outbreak coming under control.

The arrest of 15 activists in April, including veteran politicians, a publishing tycoon and senior barristers, thrust the protest movement back into the spotlight and drew condemnation from Washington and international rights groups. China's Hong Kong affairs office warned this month that the city would never be calm unless "black-clad violent protesters" were all removed, describing them as a "political virus" that seeks independence from Beijing. Beijing blames foreign forces for fomenting unrest and says protesters



HONG KONG: Pro democracy lawmaker Eddie Chu (centre right) is surrounded by security during a scuffle with pro Beijing lawmakers at the House Committee's election of chairpersons, presided by pro-Beijing lawmaker Chan Kin Por (not seen) at the Legislative Council in Hong Kong yesterday.—AFP

are undermining the rule of law in Hong Kong.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on Sunday he believed China had threatened to interfere with the work of US journalists in Hong Kong, and warned Beijing that any decision impinging on Hong Kong's autonomy could affect the US assessment of

Hong Kong's status. Britain returned Hong Kong to China in 1997, and the territory was promised a "high degree of autonomy" for 50 years. The "one country, two systems" deal formed the basis of the territory's special status under US law, which has helped it thrive as a world financial centre.—Reuters

'Express burials' hide the true COVID-19 picture in Nicaragua

MANAGUA: Doctors are warning of looming COVID-19 chaos in Nicaragua, where victims' families and the opposition accuse President Daniel Ortega's government of ordering "express burials" to hide the true number of infections. To date, the Central American country has confirmed just 25 cases of the coronavirus and eight deaths. But rights groups and experts believe the numbers are far higher. "We are entering a phase of rapid community spread of the virus," epidemiologist Alvaro Ramirez told AFP. "As the exponential curve continues to increase and more people become infected, we are going to get a chaotic situation." In contrast to restrictions in other Latin American countries, Nicaragua has been criticized for an almost complete absence of measures to contain the virus.

Ortega's government has kept schools and offices open and maintained crowd-pulling events like the national soccer league. Hospital staff report a health system overwhelmed by patients with respiratory illnesses, and relatives say the bodies of loved ones are being carted off in pick-up trucks for "express burials" without their consent. "Mourners are forced to chase trucks with the coffin to find out where their loved ones are being buried," the opposition National Coalition said in a statement denouncing government secrecy. Relatives "are threatened by police or paramilitaries so that they do not tell the truth about the causes of death," it said.

Consuelo Mendoza said she never got a chance to say goodbye to her husband. Alberto "Paraiso" Mendoza was a popular 74-year-old former softball player who was hospitalized for breathing problems on May 2. That was the last day she saw him. "He had fever, a cough and clogged lungs," Consuelo told AFP. She was not allowed to visit him during the entire 11-day period he was being treated before he died. After his death, she had three hours to organize a burial, and only one of his daughters was able to attend, she said. Alberto Mendoza's death certificate says he died of "respiratory failure and atypical pneumonia," but his family suspects he was a victim of COVID-19.

Mendoza died in the western town of Chinandega, which is seen as the epicenter of Nicaragua's crisis. The tension resulting from Nicaragua's official secrecy around the coronavirus crisis is palpable. Uniformed and plainclothes police guard the entrances to hospitals and cemeteries to keep journalists and photographers away and prevent them from speaking to the relatives of patients.

The Nicaraguan Medical Association said at least 74 health workers had been infected with COVID-19. Its president, Gretel Solis, claims that the country is already at the "community transmission" phase of the pandemic. Pulmonologist Carlos Quant said many doctors "are working blind" without adequate COVID-19 testing. "A lot of patients are coming to hospitals with data suggestive of COVID-19, both clinically and radiologically, but tests are not available," he said. "So many of these cases end up with a diagnosis of atypical pneumonia," said Quant, who works in a private medical center.

Private companies are not authorized to carry out COVID-19 testing. The Citizen Observatory, a non-governmental organization made up of health workers and activists, said 266 people had died of COVID-19 as of May 13, with 1,270 suspected



MANAGUA: The coffin with the body of a patient who died with symptoms of the new coronavirus, COVID-19, is carried by relatives to be buried at the Oriental Cemetery in Managua.—AFP

cases of the disease. "The families of those killed by COVID-19 face a government that is lying to them, giving them death certificates that do not correspond to the diagnostic truth," opposition politicians said. Nicaraguan vice president Rosario Murillo—Ortega's wife—accused the opposition of spreading lies in order to stoke anti-government sentiment. Alluding to widespread reports of "express burials," she accused the media of "creating false realities" to make it appear that events in other countries were happening in Nicaragua.—AFP

WHO are you? In 5 snapshots

GENEVA: Here is a look at the World Health Organization in five snapshots, as the UN agency's World Health Assembly decision-making body holds its annual conference this week:

Founded in ashes of WWII

When diplomats met in 1945 to form the United Nations in the aftermath of World War II, they discussed establishing a global health body. The WHO came into being three years later on April 7, 1948. The WHO is founded on the principle that "the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being". The organization defines health as: "A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." The WHO now has more than 7,000 employees in its 150 country offices, six regional offices and its Geneva headquarters. It has 194 member states.

Leadership structure

The WHO's governance is split between the World Health Assembly, the executive board and the director-general. The WHA is the WHO's decision-making body, attended once a year by delegations from member states. It decides the policy, appoints the director-general, supervises financial policies

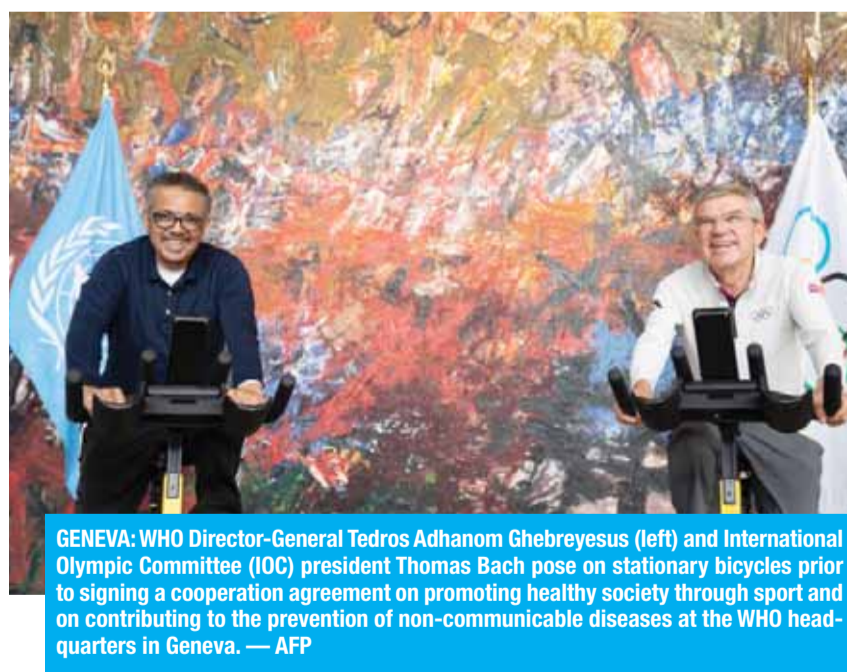
and approves the budget. An executive board of 34 technically qualified members elected for three-year terms, meets twice a year: in January, when it decides the WHA agenda, and in May, following the assembly. Its main job is to advise the WHA and to implement its decisions. The director-general is appointed by the WHA on the board's nomination. Its eighth DG, in post since 2017, is 55-year-old former Ethiopian health and foreign minister Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

Funding

The WHO budget runs on two-year cycles. It gets its money from member states and non-governmental organizations, their membership fees calculated according to wealth and population. But these "assessed contributions" account for less than a quarter of the WHO's funding. Most of it now comes from voluntary contributions from member states and donors alike. The WHO's budget for 2018-2019 was \$5.62 billion, of which \$4.3 billion was in specified voluntary contributions. Overall, the top contributors were the United States (15.9 percent), the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (9.4 percent), Britain (7.7 percent), Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance (6.6 percent) and Germany (5.2 percent).

Successes

The WHO has played a major role in eradicating and curtailing several serious diseases. Following a massive vaccination campaign, the WHO declared in May 1980 that smallpox had been completely wiped out. In 2016,



GENEVA: WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus (left) and International Olympic Committee (IOC) president Thomas Bach pose on stationary bicycles prior to signing a cooperation agreement on promoting healthy society through sport and on contributing to the prevention of non-communicable diseases at the WHO headquarters in Geneva.—AFP

five of the eight tropical diseases against which a research program was launched in 1975 had been all but eliminated. Malaria has not been seen on the European continent since the early 2000s. It has also launched ambitious efforts to eradicate polio. So far, cases of the crippling disease have decreased by 99 percent since 1988, when it was endemic in 125 countries and 350,000 cases were recorded worldwide. The WHO launched an ambitious program with UNAIDS in December 2003 to provide anti-AIDS drugs to millions of patients in developing countries, particularly in Africa.

Setbacks

The WHO's handling of the Ebola outbreak in west Africa between late 2013 and 2016, which killed more than 11,300 people, is seen as perhaps its biggest failure. The organization was blamed for initially underestimating the scale of the crisis. It was forced to undergo a massive reform after being slammed for responding too slowly and failing to grasp the gravity of that outbreak until it was out of control. The WHO declared the outbreak an international health emergency in August 2014, almost five months after the virus appeared in Guinea, which many non-governmental organizations thought was far too late.—AFP

Afghan president, rival Abdullah sign power-sharing deal

KABUL: Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and his rival Abdullah Abdullah signed a power-sharing deal on Sunday, ending a bitter months-long feud that plunged the country into political crisis. The breakthrough, which sees Abdullah heading peace talks with the Taliban, comes as Afghanistan battles a rapid spread of the deadly coronavirus and surging militant violence that saw dozens killed in brutal attacks last week. The United States and NATO welcomed the agreement, with both calling for a renewed peace push in the war-ravaged country.

"Doctor Abdullah will lead the National Reconciliation High Commission and members of his team will be included in the cabinet," Ghani spokesman Sediq Sediqqi said on Twitter. Abdullah's spokesman, Fraidoon Khawzoon, told AFP the agreement ensures that Abdullah's group will get 50 percent of cabinet positions and other provincial governors' posts. Ghani hailed a "historic day" for Afghanistan, noting that the agreement was reached without any international mediation. "We will share the burden and our shoulders, God willing, will be lighter," he said, addressing Abdullah at the signing ceremony broadcast on a state-run television channel.

"In the days ahead, we hope that with unity and cooperation, we would be able to first pave the ground for a ceasefire and then lasting peace." Abdullah said the deal commits to forming a "more inclusive, accountable and competent administration". "It's meant to ensure a path to peace, improve governance, protect rights, respect laws and values," he said on Twitter after signing the deal. The agreement says that Ghani will make Abdul Rashid Dostum, his former vice president turned ally of Abdullah, a marshal of the armed forces. Dostum, a notorious former warlord, is accused of ordering the torture and rape of a political rival in 2016.

Political settlement a US 'priority'

The United States, which wants to salvage the peace process and end its involvement in what has become its longest war, expressed hope that talks could now move forward. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told Ghani and Abdullah "that the priority for the United States remains a political settlement to end the conflict," his spokeswoman said in a statement. NATO, which maintains a training mission in Afghanistan, issued a similar message. "We call on the Taliban to live up to their commitments, reduce violence now, take part in intra-Afghan negotiations, and make real compromise for lasting peace," NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg said in a statement.

US pressure on rivals

Pictures released by the presidential palace showed Abdullah and Ghani sitting side-by-side for the signing ceremony, while leading Afghan figures including former president Hamid Karzai looked on. Abdullah had previously served as Afghanistan's "chief executive" under an earlier power-sharing arrangement, but lost that post after he was defeated in a presidential election that incumbent Ghani - a former World Bank economist - won in September amid claims of fraud.—AFP

Business

TUESDAY, MAY 19, 2020

10 2020 list of UK's richest shows huge fall in wealth



10 Thai economy slips into recession



11 Output crash and demand revival offer hope to falling oil market



TOKYO: Pedestrians walk on a crossing in Tokyo yesterday. Japan dived into its first recession since 2015, according to official data yesterday with the world's third-largest economy shrinking by 0.9 percent in the first quarter as it wrestles with the fallout from the coronavirus. — AFP

Japan economy slides into recession

Country on course for its deepest postwar slump

TOKYO: Japan dived into its first recession since 2015, according to official data yesterday with the world's third-largest economy shrinking by 0.9 percent in the first quarter as it wrestles with the fallout from the coronavirus.

The drop in gross domestic product followed a 1.9-percent decline in the fourth quarter of 2019 as a tax hike and typhoons hit Japan hard—even before the pandemic shut down much of the economy. Yesterday's first-quarter GDP data underlined the broadening impact of the outbreak, with exports plunging the most since the devastating March 2011 earthquake as global lockdowns and supply chain disruptions hit shipments of Japanese goods.

Analysts warn of an even bleaker picture for the current quarter as consumption crumbled after the government in April requested citizens to stay home and businesses to close, intensifying the challenge for policymakers battling a once-in-a-century pandemic.

"It's near certainty the economy suffered an even deeper decline in the current quarter," said Yuichi Kodama, chief economist at Meiji Yasuda Research Institute. "Japan has entered a full-blown recession."

The world's third-largest economy contracted an annualized 3.4 percent in the first quarter, preliminary official gross domestic product (GDP) data showed, less than a median market forecast for a 4.6 percent drop.

The slump came on top of an even steeper 7.3 percent fall in the October-December period, with the consecutive quarters of contraction meeting the technical definition of a recession. Japan last suffered recession in the second half of 2015.



Economists say worse to come

A recession is defined as two consecutive quarters of negative GDP growth and some analysts predicted the Japanese economy would suffer worse as the effects of the coronavirus become clear.

"We expect the worst is yet to come, with the state of emergency in Japan and the severity of the pandemic among Western nations continuing to derail the Japanese economy," said Naoya Oshikubo, senior economist at SuMi TRUST. Nevertheless, the first-quarter result was

slightly better than economists had forecast, with expectations for a 1.1-percent decline.

Japan has been hit less hard than most advanced economies by the coronavirus, with just over 16,000 cases in the whole country and around 750 deaths. However, authorities were concerned there could be an explosive spike—especially in the densely populated capital Tokyo—and urged people to stay indoors and businesses to shut down. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe declared a state of emergency that was lifted last week for most of the country but kept in place for economic powerhouse regions Tokyo and Osaka.

"Personal consumption has been the main casualty of the COVID-19 pandemic as consumer spending has been greatly affected by this due to people staying at home," Oshikubo said. "But uncertainty stemming from the spread of the virus has also hit private capital investment as companies curtail their expenditure programs," added the expert.

'Significantly worse'

In an attempt to mitigate the worst effects of the crisis, Abe has pledged to give every citizen a cash handout of 100,000 yen (\$930). The handout was part of a package of stimulus measures worth around \$1 trillion to protect jobs, bolster the medical sector and ease the pain for

working families. Tourism has dropped by as much as 90 percent, industry and trade have ground to a halt and the virus also forced the postponement of the Tokyo 2020 Olympics that was seen as providing a boost to the economy.

According to the details of the GDP report, private consumption dropped 0.7 percent quarter-on-quarter, with both household consumption and corporate investment slipping 0.8 percent and 0.5 percent respectively. But as the coronavirus pandemic battered the global economy, Japanese exports were the hardest hit, falling by six percent compared to the previous quarter. The full impact of the coronavirus on Japan's economy has still to be felt and economists are bracing for a catastrophic second quarter.

Oshikubo said his organization was forecasting an eye-watering 10.2-percent plunge in the second quarter, which would be the worst since the 2008 financial crisis. Yoshiaki Shinke, chief economist at Dai-ichi Life Research Institute, told AFP the second quarter would be "significantly worse", forecasting a decline of around six to seven percent. "As to the question of when the economy will pick up, it all depends on the number of infected and when the virus fades out." Some analysts say recovery from virus fallout may take years — AFP

US facing severe crisis, but not depression: Fed

WASHINGTON: The US is facing a severe economic downturn amid the global pandemic, but will not suffer another Great Depression and will see a recovery begin later this year, Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell said Sunday. The world's top economy was strong before the COVID-19 outbreak hit, like a natural disaster, causing nationwide business shutdowns, Powell said. And the banking system had been rebuilt stronger since the global financial crisis. Data show more than 30 million jobs were destroyed in the US, as businesses were shuttered nationwide amid the efforts to stop the spread of the virus.

For the April-June period, the economic data "will be very, very bad. There'll be a big decline in economic activity, big increase in unemployment," Powell told the CBS program "60 Minutes." But "there're some very fundamental differences" between the current crisis and the Great Depression of the last century, he said.

The US economy could "easily" collapse by 20 to 30 percent this quarter, and unemployment could peak at 20 to 25 percent, but, "it should be a much shorter downturn than you would associate with the 1930s."

The other key difference is, rather than raising interest rates, the Fed slashed lending rates to zero and is prepared to come up with new ways to support growth, Powell said.

Growth resumes Q3

"I think there's a good chance that there'll be positive growth in the third quarter," he said.

But he warned it may take time to return to normal and the US may not see a full recovery without a vaccine to treat COVID-19. "I think you'll see the economy recover steadily through the second half of this year," Powell said. But "it's going to take a while for us to get back," he said. "It could stretch through the end of next year. We really don't know."

Asked about the need for a vaccine to treat the illness and put a stop to the coronavirus pandemic, Powell stressed the importance of consumers to the economy. "For the economy to fully recover, people will have to be fully confident, and that may have to await the arrival of a vaccine," he said.

The Fed rushed in even before the economic lockdowns were fully in place, slashing the benchmark lending rate and pumping trillions of dollars into the financial system and into lending programs to support corporations, small- and medium-sized businesses and state and local governments.

The central bank chief said the Fed is prepared to do more to support the recovery. But he repeated his message that the economy likely will need more government spending to support workers and businesses to allow the economy to recover, beyond the nearly \$3 trillion already approved by Congress.

"If we let people be out of work for long periods of time, if we let businesses fail unnecessarily, waves of them, there'll be longer-term damage to the economy. The recovery will be slower," he said. —AFP

Huawei says US chip curbs hit global economy

SHENZHEN: Chinese technology giant Huawei yesterday assailed the latest US move to cut it off from semiconductor suppliers as a "pernicious" attack that will sow chaos in the global technology sector and other industries. The Commerce Department said on Friday it was tightening sanctions on Huawei—seen by Washington as a security risk—to include denying access to semiconductor designs developed using US software and technology.

The company had withheld immediate comment, but came out swinging yesterday. "The decision was arbitrary and pernicious and threatens to undermine the entire (technology) industry worldwide," a Huawei spokesman said.

Huawei, which has largely weathered an escalating 18-month campaign by the Trump administration to isolate it internationally, said its business "will inevitably be affected" by the new American salvo.

It will "impact the expansion, maintenance and continuous operations of networks worth hundreds of billions of dollars that we have rolled out in more than 170 countries". The statement was issued during an annual summit of technology analysts that it organizes at its headquarters in the southern Chinese city of



SHENZHEN: Huawei employees eat their lunch in a cafeteria at the company's headquarters in Shenzhen in China's southern Guangdong province yesterday. — AFP

Shenzhen. But it added: "This decision by the US government does not just affect Huawei. It will have a serious impact on a wide number of global industries" by creating uncertainty in the chip sector and technology supply chains. Officials said Huawei had been circumventing sanctions by obtaining chips and components that are produced around the world based on US technology. — AFP

Business

Moody's affirms Gulf Bank's long-term ratings at 'A3' with 'stable' outlook

Bank rated "A" by all four leading credit rating agencies

KUWAIT: Moody's Investors Service, the international credit rating agency, has affirmed the A3 long-term deposit ratings of Gulf Bank and changed the outlook on the Bank's long-term deposits ratings to "Stable" from "Positive".

In their recently published press release, Moody's mentioned that Gulf Bank's ba1 Baseline Credit Assessment captures the Bank's solid core revenue-generating capacity, although its bottom-line profitability remains subdued, and adequate capitalization with tangible common equity/risk-weighted assets at 13.3 percent as at December 2019. The Baseline Credit Assessment also considers the Bank's low and well-provisioned reported nonperforming loans at 1.2 percent as at December 2019. The

Bank's standalone credit profile also continues to be underpinned by comfortable liquidity and stable funding, despite funding concentration, which is typical of Kuwaiti banks.

Change in outlook

According to Moody's, The change in outlook to stable from positive on Gulf Bank's deposit ratings captures Moody's expectation that the pressure on the operating environment in Kuwait on the back of the dual shock of the coronavirus and prolonged low oil prices - with related business confidence implications on the country's small and undiversified private sector - will neutralize for the foreseeable future the positive pressures on the bank's Baseline Credit Assessment.



Recognition for bank's asset quality

Commenting on Moody's credit rating announcement, Dalal Al-Dousari, Gulf Bank's Head of Investor Relations said: "Gulf Bank continues to achieve international recognition for the sustained improvement in its assets quality. We are very pleased to receive the affirmation of our Bank's long-term deposits rating

at "A3" with a "Stable" outlook by Moody's. "This is an acknowledgement of Gulf Bank's continuous enhancement in asset quality and profitability, adequate capital and comfortable liquidity position," added Al-Dousari.

Gulf Bank continues to be well recognized internationally in terms of its credit worthiness and financial strength as it is rated "A" by all four leading credit rating agencies.

In addition to Moody's Investor Services recent affirmation, Gulf Bank has a Long-Term Issuer Default Rating at "A+" with a "Stable" Outlook by Fitch Ratings, an Issuer Credit Rating of "A-" with a "Stable" Outlook by S&P Global Ratings and a Long-term Foreign Currency Rating of "A+" with a "Stable" Outlook by Capital Intelligence Ratings.



Dalal Al-Dousari



LONDON: British inventor James Dyson, founder of the Dyson company, topped the Sunday Times rich list for the first time.

2020 list of UK's richest shows huge fall

LONDON: Britain's wealthiest people have lost tens of billions of pounds in the coronavirus pandemic as their combined annual wealth fell for the first time in a decade, the Sunday Times reported in its Rich List 2020.

The newspaper, which has produced the respected annual ranking of the country's 1,000 wealthiest people since 1989, found the past two months had resulted in the super-rich losing £54 billion (\$65 billion, 60 billion euros).

More than half of the billionaires in Britain had seen drops in their worth by as much as £6bn, a decrease in their collective wealth unprecedented since 2009 and the financial crisis. Inventor James Dyson bucked the trend to top the list for the first time, with an estimated wealth of £16.2 billion.

The paper credited his rise from fifth place in 2019 to both the strong performance of his businesses and the plummeting fortunes of other billionaires in the top 10. The Hinduja brothers, who topped last year's list with a £22bn fortune, saw among the biggest falls in worth — £6bn—and are now ranked jointly second with entrepreneurs David and Simon Reuben.

Jim Ratcliffe, boss of petrochemicals firm Ineos, who topped the rankings in 2018, also saw his worth slide by £6bn to £12.15bn.

Steel baron Lakshmi Mittal was another to see the steepest falls in his fortune—nearly £4bn—placing him 19th with a worth of £6.78 billion. In total, the 2020 list calculated the combined wealth of Britain's super-rich to be £743bn — £29bn less than last year.

Its number of billionaires dropped by four to 147 but London remains

the billionaire capital of the world, with 89 born, living or with a significant chunk of their assets based in the city. "The first detailed analysis of the super-rich's finances since the COVID-19 outbreak began will heighten concerns that Britain is entering a deep and long-lasting recession," the Sunday Times said. The paper noted at least 63 members of the list, including 20 billionaires, have sought to use a government-run furlough scheme which pays staff up to 80 percent of their salaries up to £2,500 a month during the crisis.

They include London-based Sri and Gopi Hinduja, owners of the sprawling Hinduja Group of companies, who have furloughed around 360 employees at Optare, their bus-making firm based in northern England.

Ratcliffe co-owns The Pig hotel chain, which has furloughed most of its staff, while he is also seeking an emergency loan from the government for a joint venture between Ineos and the Chinese state-owned PetroChina. Carys Roberts, executive director of the Institute for Public Policy Research, told the Sunday Times their use of the taxpayer-funded schemes was highly questionable. "Why can't they now dip into their own deep pockets instead of asking ordinary families to do so for them?" she said.

Rich List 2020 top 10

£16.2bn—James Dyson and family
£16bn—Sri and Gopi Hinduja and family
£16bn—David and Simon Reuben
£15.8bn—Leonard Blavatnik
£12.2bn—Jim Ratcliffe
£12.1bn—Kirsten and Jorn Rausing
£11.7bn—Alisher Usmanov
£10.5bn—Guy, George and Galen Jr Weston and family
£10.3bn—Charlene de Carvalho-Heineken and Michel de Carvalho
£10.3bn—The Duke of Westminster and the Grosvenor family —AFP

Thai economy slips into recession

BANGKOK: Thailand's economy contracted at its sharpest pace in eight years in the first quarter, pushing Southeast Asia's second largest economy into recession sooner than expected, as the coronavirus pandemic hit tourism and domestic activity.

The state planning agency, reporting January-March data yesterday, slashed its forecast for 2020 gross domestic product (GDP) to a contraction of 5.0-6.0 percent from growth of 1.5 percent-2.5 percent projected in February.

That would be the worst decline since 1998 when the Asian financial crisis damaged the economy. The economy shrank 1.8 percent in the first quarter from a year earlier, the deepest contraction since the fourth quarter of 2011, when there was bad flooding.

That was better than a 4.0 percent contraction seen in a Reuters poll, and compared with downwardly revised 1.5 percent growth in the final quarter of 2019. "The outbreak impact in Q2 will be much bigger than in Q1," said Phacharaphot Nugtramas, economist at Krung Thai Bank, who predicts the economy will shrink 8.8 percent this year. The impact of lockdowns, while having eased somewhat, will continue to affect household spending and private investment for the rest of the year, he added. On a quarterly basis, the economy shrank a seasonally adjusted 2.2 percent, also the worst decline since 2011, but less than the poll's 4.5 percent decline.

The agency revised October-December's quarterly GDP to a 0.2 contraction from 0.2 percent growth, meaning the economy slipped into a technical recession.

Worse yet to come
The economy will be hit the hard-



BANGKOK: People walk in a partially closed shopping mall preparing to fully re-open when the Thai government further relaxes measures to combat the spread of the COVID-19 novel coronavirus in Bangkok. — AFP

UK's Gove says EU trade deal can be done

LONDON: Senior British government minister Michael Gove said on Sunday there was a post-Brexit trade deal to be done with the European Union providing the bloc agreed to compromise, days after both sides said talks were making little progress. The United Kingdom left the EU on Jan. 31 but the main terms of its membership remain in place for a transition period until the end of this year to allow it time to negotiate a free trade agreement.

Both Britain's and the EU's chief negotiators on Friday gave downbeat assessments of the latest round of talks, saying the other side had to give ground if any progress was to be made. The stalemate has raised the prospect that there will be no deal struck, a scenario that would damage global trade as the world copes with the economic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic. On Friday, investors' concerns about the state of the trade negotiations pushed sterling to its lowest level in more than a month.

The main sticking point in the talks has been so-called "level playing field" rules to ensure fair competition. The

EU says they are indispensable to ensure Britain does not undercut its standards, but Britain rejects them as binding to European laws.

Gove, the British Cabinet Office Minister, said this and issues such as future fishing rights remained sticking points. "We're making it clear to the EU we can't do a deal on those terms," he told Sky News. "But I am confident that there is a deal to be done. It just requires a degree of flexibility on the EU side which I'm sure that they will appreciate they need to show." However, in a demonstration of the hurdles ahead, Irish Foreign Minister Simon Coveney - who played a key role in Britain's EU exit talks due to the border Ireland shares with the British province of Northern Ireland - said Britain had to move on the level playing field issue to break the deadlock.

He told Irish national broadcaster RTE on Sunday that Britain was "essentially rewriting" what it had committed to in the political declaration of the Brexit deal. "Until the UK changes its approach in the context of giving the EU assurance that they are not going to effectively deregulate their economy while expecting free access in the EU single market. I think we're going to continue to be in real difficulty in these talks," he added. Britain's Mail on Sunday newspaper reported that the government was preparing to walk away altogether if no progress was made at the next round of talks due to begin in 15 days' time and if the EU did not shift. —Reuters

Air Canada to lay off half its workforce

MONTREAL: Air Canada announced that it will lay off at least half of its staff due to the collapse of its business during the coronavirus pandemic.

The airline decided to slash its workforce after reducing flights by 95 percent due to border closures and lockdown measures, it said in a statement emailed to employees and seen by AFP. The company, which employs about 38,000 people, says it does not expect a return to normal for a long time. "Today we took the very painful decision to reduce our operations according to plan, which unfortunately means a reduction in our workforce by 50 to 60 per cent," the email said. The current workforce allows the airline to operate about 1,500 flights a day, using 258 aircraft. "In the current economic climate, an operation on this scale is not viable for the future," the airline said.

"We are doing this to preserve our cash flow, to bring the size of the company in line with expected traffic levels over the medium and long term and to position ourselves for renewed growth when business resumes." —AFP

UK economy expects only slow recovery

LONDON: Britain's economy is unlikely to have a quick bounce back as it recovers from its coronavirus shutdown which could have wiped more than 30 percent off output last month, the head of the country's budget forecasting office said on Sunday. Robert Chote, chairman of the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR), said April was probably the bottom of the crash as the government is now moving to gradually ease its lockdown restrictions.

"We know that the economy, probably at its worst last month, may have been a third or so smaller than it normally would have been, in terms of output of goods and services and people's spending," he told BBC television. "But that should be the worst of it." Britain, like many other countries, has shut down much of its economy to slow the spread of COVID-19.

Last month, the OBR said Britain's gross domestic product could plummet by 13 percent in 2020, its biggest collapse in more than 300 years. Chote said a quick, V-shaped recovery included in that report was only meant to be an illustrative scenario to show the hit to the public finances. "In practice I think you are likely not to see the economy bouncing back to where we would have expected it otherwise to be by the end of the year, on that assumption, but instead a rather slower recovery," Chote said. As well as the pace of the lifting of the lockdown, the speed of the recovery would depend on how cautious consumers remained and how companies adjust to changes in the economy such as more demand for online retailing and less for restaurants. Chote said Britain would not necessarily have to return to severe public spending cuts to cope with the debt surge that will come from its response to the coronavirus crisis.

Key factors include how much permanent damage the economy suffers, the level of interest rates on public debt - which are currently rock-bottom - and how much the country wants to spend on health and other services. "But a post financial crisis-style, extended period of austerity is not a done deal," Chote said, adding tax increases were another option. Prime Minister Boris Johnson has said he will not lead Britain into a new period of austerity after previous Conservative-led governments sought to fix the public finances by cutting spending in many areas of public services. — Reuters

Indonesia plans \$8.6bn bailout for state firms

JAKARTA: Indonesia is planning an \$8.6 billion bailout for 12 state-owned firms, to reduce the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, mostly as cash compensation and working capital investments, according to government documents reviewed by Reuters.

The government has proposed to parliament to provide 128.04 trillion rupiah (\$8.63 billion) in financial support to the companies, according to Ministry of Finance documents presented in a May 11 meeting with parliament's financial commission. A finance ministry spokeswoman on Sunday confirmed the authenticity of the documents and that they were used in the parliament presentation. But, the documents were used in an early stage consultation with lawmakers and still need President Joko Widodo's approval, she said.

National flag carrier Garuda Indonesia, which is trying to restructure \$500 million worth of Islamic bonds that mature next month amid a plunge in passengers, would receive 8.5 trillion rupiah in working capital investments, according to the documents. Kartika Wirjoatmodjo, deputy minister of state-owned enterprises, told Reuters last week the government was arranging a \$500 million bridging loan for Garuda. Power utility Perusahaan Listrik Negara would receive cash compensation of 35.42 trillion rupiah this year, while oil and gas firm Pertamina would get 43.91 trillion rupiah paid in instalments through to 2022, the documents showed.

Both companies have previously said sales of electricity and fuel declined because of curbs on travel and work to control the coronavirus outbreak, which as of Saturday has infected 17,025 and killed 1,089 in the Southeast Asian country. —Reuters

Health & Science

COVID widens climate rift between oil majors

LONDON: Europe's top oil and gas companies have diverted a larger share of their cash to green energy projects since the coronavirus outbreak in a bet the global health crisis will leave a long-term dent in fossil fuel demand, according to a Reuters review of company statements and interviews with executives.

The plans of companies like BP, Royal Dutch Shell and Total are in step with the European Union's efforts to transition to a lower-carbon economy and away from a century-old reliance on oil, and reflect the region's widening rift with the United States where both the government and the top drillers are largely staying committed to oil and gas.

"We are all living differently and there is a real possibility that some of this will stick," BP Chief Executive Bernard Looney told Reuters in a recent interview, citing big declines in air and road travel, and a boost in telecommuting. Global oil majors have all cut capital spending sharply as worldwide stay-at-home orders triggered by the coronavirus outbreak slammed fuel demand and sent oil prices to record lows.

But Europe's top five producers - BP, Shell, Total, Eni, and Equinor - are all focusing their investment cuts mainly on oil and gas activities, and giving their renewables and low carbon businesses a relative boost, according to Reuters calculations. Company executives and investors say they expect fossil fuel demand to peak earlier than previously thought. At the same time, the EU is expected to focus economic stimulus on green energy infrastructure in the wake of the crisis to further align it with the ambitions of the Paris agreement to fight climate change, making investments in the sector more attractive.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen recently pledged to make climate policies the bloc's "motor for the recovery." BP aims to keep its previously planned \$500 million in spending on low-carbon initiatives this year intact, despite a company-wide spending cut of 20 percent in the wake of the coronavirus, its incoming Chief Financial Officer Murray Auchincloss said in an analyst call on April 28.



A combination of file photos shows the logos of five of the largest publicly traded oil companies; BP, Chevron, Exxon Mobil, Royal Dutch Shell, and Total. — Reuters

Shell CEO Ben van Beurden, meanwhile, told reporters in an April 30 conference call he also wants to "spare" the company's New Energy division, which is focused on renewables and low-carbon technologies, from the worst of its budget cuts. "We still believe there is an energy transition under way that may pick up speed in the recovery stage and we want to be well-positioned," van Beurden said.

Total still plans to spend its previously planned \$1.5-\$2 billion on its low-carbon business, despite cutting its overall 2020 spending by \$3 billion to \$15 billion, CEO Patrick Pouyanné said in an interview with French paper Le Figaro on May 6.

Equinor and Eni also both expressed a continued commitment to their plans to transition to clean energy. An Equinor spokesman confirmed

the company is not changing its planned \$1 billion of investment in renewables and low carbon energy in 2020 and 2021, despite cuts elsewhere. Equinor, Shell and Total also announced on May 15 they are investing in a project in Norway to capture and store carbon. Even after the rejiggered spending, investments in renewables and low-carbon technologies for the top five European oil companies represents no more than 15 percent of total investments, and climate advocates are pressuring the companies to do more.

The group had already outlined plans to sharply reduce carbon emissions by 2050 prior to the coronavirus outbreak. Some investor said, however, that these plans fall short of the Paris climate goals.

London-based investor Sarasin & Partners said that neither Shell or Total "has set out how they will

shift capital away from expanding fossil fuel production to the extent required by their ambitions."

Trans-Atlantic rift

The biggest US oil and gas companies are taking a different path, encouraged by a government that is a vocal supporter of expanding fossil fuel production: investment in business ventures outside petroleum hardly register, and that is not going to change without a shift in government policy.

Chevron CEO Mike Wirth told investors in a conference call on May 1 he expects demand for oil and gas to rebound after the coronavirus pandemic lifts. "The world is not ready to transition to another source of energy in large part anytime soon," he said.

Exxon Mobil CEO Darren Woods echoed the view in a call with analysts on the same day. "I know that there are a lot of different views on what the future holds, but I want to be clear on how we see it: The long-term fundamentals that drive our business have not changed."

US President Donald Trump's administration has long cast doubt on the science of climate change and has decided to pull out of the Paris climate agreement citing the economic cost. The administration is also contemplating ways to pump billions into its oil and gas sector through tax breaks to preserve an industry that rapidly grew over the past decade. The yawning transatlantic divide offers investors a troubling choice, according to analysts.

On the one hand, aligning with international commitments to the Paris deal seems like a "safe choice", according to Bruce Duguid, head of stewardship Hermes Equity Ownership Services.

On the other hand, the deeply depressed prices for fossil fuels since the onset of the coronavirus could make it the easy choice for consumers as economies recover.

"At the moment it is not clear who is right," said Tal Lomnitzer, senior investment manager at Janus Henderson. "It is possible that Exxon and Chevron will emerge from the other side of the crisis looking like heroes. Or possibly irresponsible." — Reuters

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PAGE

248 33 199

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Lifestyle | Features

Last-ditch bid to save Oslo building with Picasso murals

Face masks are rare and social distances vary but the human chain spreads out, braving the risk of infection, as activists in Oslo make a last-ditch bid to save a building adorned with artwork designed by Spanish master painter Pablo Picasso. Damaged in rightwing extremist Anders Behring Breivik's July 2011 attacks, the "Y Block", a government building complex named for its shape and completed in 1969, is due to be demolished any day now. On its grey cement walls are two Picasso drawings, sandblasted by Norwegian artist Carl Nesjar, who collaborated with the Spaniard.

On the facade facing the street, "The Fishermen" depicts three men hauling their oversized catch on board their boat. In the lobby, "The Seagull" shows the bird, its wings spread wide, devouring a fish. Etched in the Spanish painter's childlike strokes, the two works will be cut out and relocated to new government buildings due to be built in the central Oslo neighborhood. But not everyone is okay with that plan.

"We're going to be kicking ourselves for years," blasts Erik Lie, one of the 200 or so Norwegians who have come to protest against the demolition on this freezing May morning, one link in the human chain in front of the building. "I hope it's not too late," he says, his orange woolly hat reading "Let Y Stand", before adding fatalistically: "But this will probably be a pile of rubble soon."

Symbol of democracy

Because of the new coronavirus, protesters are linked by meter-long ribbons in a bid to keep them at a safe distance from one another. Energized by their despair, they still harbor dreams of ripping the building from the bulldozers' claws. But behind them, beyond the high fences, the sound of metal saws suggests the preparations are well underway. According to Statsbygg, the public agency in charge of overseeing the demolition, the murals are to be dismantled before the end of spring.

The nearby "H Block" building, built in the late 1950s and which has three other Picasso murals, was home to the prime minister's offices until Breivik blew up a van loaded with 950 kilos (2,100 pounds) of explosives at its base. "H Block" will be renovated and will continue to tower over the new ministry buildings. For some, the symbolism is inevitable: these buildings remain standing, despite Breivik's attempts to bring them — and democracy — down. "Y Block is an iconic building in Oslo that has survived a terrorist attack and now the government wants to tear it down. And nobody can actually give a good argument for why they should," says Tone Dalen, one of the figureheads of the protests. The government meanwhile insists that the demolition of "Y Block" to make space for new buildings was a difficult but necessary decision. "It will improve security and accessibility for cyclists and



A picture shows protest posters in front of a government-building adorned with Picasso murals in Oslo during a demonstration in a last-ditch effort to try to save a government-building adorned with Picasso murals.—AFP

pedestrians, and will provide a more open and greener space, as well as offices suited to the future ministries," said Modernisation Minister Nikolai Astrup.

Too late

"The Fishermen" and "The Seagull" — whose existence many Norwegians were unaware of until the question of their relocation arose — are supposed to be made more visible to the public in their future location. "A lot of people think that it's also the Picasso that deserves to be preserved but it's also the architecture and the interaction between 'Y Block' and 'H Block', the history that it represents," insists Erik Lie. "These are monuments that illustrate the rebuilding of Norway after the war, and everything that I associate with the development of modern society," he says.

With their drab appearance, the buildings' aesthetic qualities may be debated but supporters insist that you cannot destroy everything you don't like. "Maybe we don't find it beautiful today, but perhaps in 30 years we'll think the opposite," notes Cecilie Geelmuyden, a 50-year-old civil servant and protest supporter. Despite a growing number of protests in recent weeks, the demolition process now appear irreversible. At the end of August, the Oslo district court is to consider a request to have the demolition declared illegal. But that will be too late, in all likelihood. As Lie predicts, by then, "Y Block" will probably be nothing more than a pile of rubble.—AFP

HOLLYWOOD HYPE MACHINE PLOTS VIRUS-PROOF RED CARPETS

Red-carpet premieres are the pinnacle of any new Hollywood blockbuster's publicity blitz. Their A-list entourages, elbow-to-elbow fans and showbiz photographers vying for the perfect snaps of glamorous stars, are also a nightmare for social distancing. But with California coronavirus restrictions easing, and major movies like "Tenet" eyeing July release dates, Tinseltown's marketing gurus are scrambling for ways to safely roll out those carpets once again. "Prior to what we're going through, it was about getting a lot of attention and getting big crowds to come together and sharing with as many people as possible to help spread the excitement," said Elizabeth Tramontozzi, of leading Hollywood event planners 15140 Productions.

"It's going to be massively different moving forward," she told AFP. Her company, which built an epic "Game of Thrones" set in New York for last year's series finale and has launched Disney movies with extravagant premieres on Hollywood Boulevard, has spent the lockdown drawing up new designs. These include plexiglass barriers between journalists and stars, screened-off "pods" for interviews via video link, and drop-off zones where pre-selected fans appear on LED screens to engage with actors. Entourages will be asked to enter socially-distanced theaters via "bypass lanes" that free up the red carpet for the stars alone. Temperature checks for all guests are being considered, while fans would be physically barred from attending. "We need to enclose ourselves first so that there is no gathering on sidewalks and people watching," said 15140 president Craig Waldman. With everyone left surrounding the carpet spaced out, "the carpet's just going to be a little wider and the carpet's



In this file photo taken on March 9, 2020 US-Chinese actress Yifei Liu attends the world premiere of Disney's "Mulan" at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood.

going to be a little bit longer," he added.

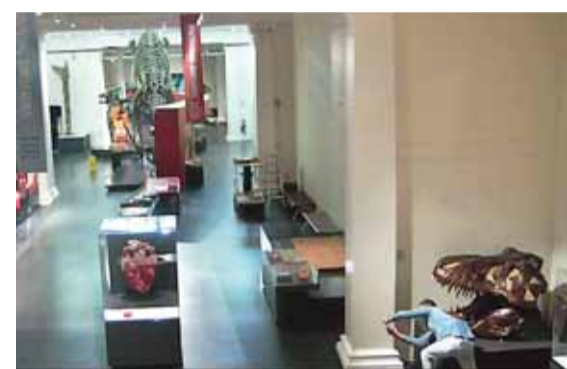
'Hope it happens'

Even so, publicists do not expect lavish Los Angeles after-premiere parties — and their crowded open bars and buffets — to return for several months, or possibly until a vaccine emerges. Pop-up immersive experiences, a growing part of the Hollywood hype machine, may also need a rethink, with the focus now solely on building awareness rather than drawing crowds. More immediately, with streaming giants such as Netflix and Amazon continuing to launch major titles during lockdown, "virtual" press junkets in which interviews are conducted entirely online are growing

in popularity.

15140 has created a mobile studio in a trailer which can be carted between movie stars' homes, fitted out with the branding of whichever film or television show is being launched. The firm has even drawn up plans for "drive-in" premieres, where celebrities park up in the front row or sit on branded picnic blankets to interact with fans via camera link. Still, almost all of this year's biggest blockbusters have been delayed until traditional movie theaters reopen, and publicists are itching to get back to famous venues such as Hollywood Boulevard's TCL Chinese Theatre for their launch events. "Let's be honest, people are tired of being at home," said Waldman.

While glitzy premieres might jar at a time when people are dying and unemployment is soaring, major entertainment and sport events can provide a welcome distraction for stir-crazy fans, he added. "People right now are kind of starving for something to make their life feel normal." The big test will be Warner Bros' "Tenet," the latest mega-budget thriller from director Christopher Nolan ("Inception," "The Dark Knight") who has reportedly pushed hard for it to be the first Hollywood blockbuster back in theaters. Tellingly, its July 17 US release date has yet to shift. "I really hope it happens — we know there's a lot of eyes on it, and we're excited by it," said Waldman, who is working on the premiere. "We spent a lot of time to create the plans we've created, to make an environment that's safe for the studio, for the press, and for the talent... We all want to go back to work as well."—AFP



Intruder snaps selfies in closed Australian museum

Police in Australia are hunting a man who took a late-night tour of a closed Sydney museum, posing for selfies with a dinosaur skull before making off with a cowboy hat and a picture. The intruder climbed up scaffolding into The Australian Museum at around 1:00 am last Sunday and went on a leisurely wander through the empty building, local police said. "He was in there for about 40 minutes... he certainly enjoyed his night at the museum," New South Wales Police Detective Chief Inspector Sean Heaney said Friday. Security cameras caught the man taking photos with displays, posing with his head inside the jaws of a Tyrannosaurus skull and searching cupboards.

The man eventually left the museum with the hat and a picture from a wall, officers said. The Australian Museum has been closed since last year for renovations and police believe the refurbishment work made his entry easier. Other museums and galleries around Australia are also closed as part of coronavirus shutdowns. "It's very serious, we shouldn't make light of this," Heaney said, as he appealed for witnesses to help catch the man. "We're lucky he hasn't damaged any historical artifacts or anything that is expensive in there."—AFP



In this file photo Malian musician Rokia Traore performs during the Fete de la Musique at the Hotel Matignon in Paris on June 21, 2016.—AFP

Mali singer Traore flees French justice to return home

Malian singer Rokia Traore has flown home, flouting a ban issued by a French court which was to hand her over to Belgium over a child custody dispute, her lawyer said on Sunday. The singer and guitarist was arrested in March on a European arrest warrant when she arrived from Bamako at Paris' Charles de Gaulle airport. This followed a Belgian court ruling last year ordering her to return her five-year-old daughter to the child's Belgian father, from whom Traore is separated. A Paris court subsequently ruled that she could be extradited but allowed her conditional release. "Back in Bamako. The quest for justice continues," Traore said on her Facebook page on Tuesday in a post that was only spotted on Sunday by the French daily Le Parisien.

In a post dated Friday, Traore, who flew back to Mali on a private flight, claimed not to be "a terrorist". "This is a mother in a desperate plight who is afraid that her child will be torn from her," her lawyer Kenneth Feliho told AFP. "That is why she left for Mali where she lives." Traore is appealing the decision of the Belgian court granting full custody to her former partner. According to her lawyer, a decision in the Mali courts had accorded custody to the singer. An award-winning musician, Traore is also known for her advocacy work for refugees, and was made a UN ambassador for refugees in 2016.—AFP



This handout image released courtesy of 15140 Productions shows a conceptual rendering of press interview pens separated by plexiglass for red-carpet arrival events.—AFP photos



In this file photo US actor Jason Momoa (right) and his wife actress Lisa Bonet arrive for the "Game of Thrones" eighth and final season premiere at Radio City Music Hall in New York City.

Aussie soap Neighbours promises sparks despite virus

Sparks will continue to fly on Australian soap opera Neighbours even though the stars must keep their distance, the show's creators promised after production resumed following a virus hiatus. The long-running Melbourne-based drama, which has launched the careers of several stars including Kylie Minogue, is one of the first shows to press ahead with filming under strict social distancing rules as the television industry adapts to new norms. Since restarting almost three weeks ago, producers have imposed daily temperature checks, a ban on visitors to the set and a rule that the cast must do their own make-up.

Clever camera work would compensate for any lack of physical contact between the characters, executive producer Jason Herbison told AFP. "There is no kissing or hugging. However, we aren't editing characters to look physically closer as such, but rather we are relying more on close-ups to create a feeling of intimacy," he said. The show, which has been aired in more than 60 countries, focuses on the lives of families in the fictional suburban community of Ramsay Street.

When virus restrictions forced the production team to take a break in March, its creators immediately began planning how to return under new health guidelines, Herbison said. "We are taking advantage of every inch of the site and spreading everyone out, creating separate areas which limit the movements of each individual," he added. Another popular Aussie TV export, soap opera Home and Away, is also set to roll again as the number of coronavirus cases in Australia slows to a trickle, local media reported. Herbison said industry professionals had been collaborating on how best to get back on track. "One positive and unexpected con-

sequence of COVID-19 is the way it's brought producers around the world together," he said.

"I've had conversations with contemporaries from Australia, the US and the UK and there's a great spirit of sharing advice and wisdom." Lingering signs of the virus — such as hand sanitiser — may show up on screen in future episodes, he added, but a decision was made to leave the fictional world of Ramsay Street largely untouched by the pandemic. "There's a creative question — will our viewers want to switch on Neighbours and relive it again? Or is our job to provide escapism?" Herbison said. "I tend to feel it's the latter."—AFP



An undated handout photo received from Fremantle shows cast and crew observing social distancing during the filming of the Australian soap opera Neighbours in Melbourne.—AFP

Bake cheesecake to beat cabin fever, says Canadian provincial chief

After 60 days of coronavirus lockdown, the leader of Ontario province offered Canadians a recipe to beat their cabin fever on Friday: his aunt's home-made cheesecake. "Do you know what one of the most popular ways to manage stress is? Baking!" Premier Doug Ford said in a tweet accompanying the two-and-a-half-minute clip which 250,000 people viewed by midday. Ford had boasted about the "made from scratch" recipe to reporters at a daily pandemic briefing earlier in the week. "You can tell I've eaten one too many cheesecakes," said the portly and self-deprecating leader, whose folksy, no-nonsense style helped to catapult his personal popularity during the state of emergency. Indeed, baking has become a popular pastime for many homebound Canadians and Americans in recent weeks, prompting a run on flour at grocery stores across North America.

In the video, Ford measures out ingredients all laid out on his kitchen counter at home, spins an electric mixer and melts ingredients in a pot on the stove, while commenting: "Put a little butter, put a little graham crackers, put a little sugar... Beautiful." "If I wasn't premier, I'd open up a cheesecake factory," he quips, dressed casually in a black t-shirt that reads "We're all in this together." And then, after topping it off with a can of cherries and tasting a spoonful of his creation, he throws a kiss and lets out a hearty "ho ho."—AFP



This photo shows Jackfruit 360 director James Joseph speaking during an interview with AFP in Kalady, some 46 kms from Thrissur in the south Indian state of Kerala.—AFP photos



Varghese Tharakkan harvesting a jackfruit at an orchard at his Ayur jackfruit farm.

INDIA'S 'SUPERFOOD' JACKFRUIT GOES GLOBAL

Green, spiky and with a strong, sweet smell, the bulky jackfruit has morphed from a backyard nuisance in India's south coast into the meat-substitute darling of vegans and vegetarians in the West. Part of the South Asia's diet for centuries, jackfruit was so abundant that tons of it went to waste every year. But now India, the world's biggest producer of jackfruit, is capitalizing on its growing popularity as a "superfood" meat alternative — touted by chefs from San Francisco to London and Delhi for its pork-like texture when unripe. "There are a lot of enquiries from abroad... At the international level, the interest in jackfruit has grown manifold," Varghese Tharakkan tells AFP from his orchard in Kerala's Thrissur district.

The fruit, which weighs five kilograms (11 pounds) on average, has a waxy yellow flesh when ripe and is eaten fresh, or used to make cakes, juices, ice creams and crisps. When unripe, it is added to curries or fried, minced and sauted. In the West, shredded jackfruit has become a popular alternative to pulled pork and is even used as a pizza topping. "People love it," Anu Bhambri, who owns a chain of restaurants in the US and India, explains. "The jackfruit tacos have been a hit at each and every location. The jackfruit cutlet — every table orders it, it's one of my favourites!" James Joseph quit his job as a director at Microsoft after spotting Western interest in jackfruit "gaining momentum as a vegan alternative to meat".

Jack of all fruits

The COVID-19 crisis, Joseph says, has created two spikes in consumer interest. "Coronavirus caused a fear for chicken and people switched to tender jackfruit. In Kerala, lockdown caused a surge in demand for mature green jackfruit and seeds due to shortage of vegetables due to border restrictions," he explains. Global interest in veganism was already soaring pre-pandemic, buoyed by movements such as Meat Free Mondays and Veganuary, and with it the business of "alternative meats". Concerns about health and the environment — a 2019 UN report suggested adopting more of a plant-based diet could help mitigate climate change — mean consumers are turning to brands such as Impossible and Beyond Meat for plant-based repli-cations of chicken, beef, and pork.



Varghese Tharakkan posing with ripe jackfruit.

But they are also using substitutes long popular in Asia such as soy-based tofu and tempeh, and wheat derivative seitan, as well as jackfruit. This boom has meant more and more jackfruit orchards have sprung up in the coastal state. "You get a hard bite like meat — that's what is gaining popularity and like meat it absorbs the spices," comments Joseph.

His firm sells jackfruit flour which can be mixed with or used as an alternative to wheat and rice flour to make anything from burger patties to local classics such as idli.

Joseph worked with Sydney University's Glycemic Index Research Service to establish any

health benefits. "When we did a nutritional analysis, we found jackfruit as a meal is better than rice and roti (bread) for an average person who wants to control his blood sugar," he adds. India has one of the highest diabetes rates in the world and is expected to hit around 100 million cases by 2030, according to a study by The Lancet.

'Secrets of success'

As global warming wreaks havoc on agriculture, food researchers say jackfruit could emerge as a nutritious staple crop as it is drought-resistant and requires little maintenance. Tharakkan has not looked back since he switched from growing rubber to jackfruit on his land, and has a variety that he can cultivate year-round. "When I cut down my rubber trees everyone thought I had gone crazy. But the same people now come and ask me the secret of my success," he smiles. In Tamil Nadu and Kerala alone, demand for jackfruit is now 100 metric tons every day during the peak season yielding a turnover of \$19.8 million a year, says economics professor S. Rajendran of the Gandhigram Rural Institute. But there is rising competition from countries such as Bangladesh and Thailand. Jackfruit's newfound international fame is a massive turnaround for a plant that while used in local dishes, has long been viewed as a poor man's fruit. Each tree can yield as 150-250 fruits a season.

In Kerala, where it is believed to have originated, deriving its name from local word "chakka", Tharakkan recalls it was not unusual to see notices in private gardens asking people to take away the fruit for free because they were so plentiful, they would simply rot and attract flies. And while India's jackfruit growers — like the wider agriculture sector — have been hit as the nationwide coronavirus lockdown causes a shortage of labour and transport, international demand shows no sign of slowing. Sujan Sarkar, the Palo Alto-based executive chef of Bhabri's restaurants, believes even meat-eaters are becoming jackfruit converts. He adds: "It's not only vegetarians or vegans, even the meat-eaters, they just love it.—AFP



A worker at Varghese Tharakkan's Ayur jackfruit farm displaying jackfruit dishes.



A worker at Varghese Tharakkan's Ayur jackfruit farm preparing a jackfruit dish.



Varghese Tharakkan preparing ripe jackfruit at an orchard at his Ayur jackfruit farm.



Varghese Tharakkan preparing ripe jackfruit.



Carolyn Ellis (right) hugs her mother Susan Watts using the "hug glove" that Carolyn and her husband Andrew Ellis created as a Mother's Day gift in Guelph, Ontario, Canada.—AFP photos



'Hug glove' gives Canada family bit of normalcy in pandemic

A Canadian woman has come up with an ingenious way to safely hug her mother, even during the coronavirus pandemic: the "hug glove," a plastic tarp with four sleeves hanging from a clothesline. In the southern Ontario city of Guelph, Carolyn Ellis and her husband Andrew developed the so-called "hug glove" on the eve of Mother's Day, which this year was celebrated on May 10 in North America. It "occurred to me that she wasn't getting the hugs, and we really needed to do something about that," Carolyn told AFP. "I want to give it for Mother's Day."

They taped plastic sleeves to a large tarp, allowing two people to hug each other without making direct contact. "It was very much a time effort, trying to figure out the size and the height of the holes," Ellis said. "We worked on it until late hours of Saturday night, and then we had everything set up for Mother's Day on

Sunday." "It was a great gift." A video they recorded of the moment they embraced was shared on social media and quickly went viral. But Ellis says she was surprised by how fast it took off. "I just wanted to hug my mom," she said. "We were quite shocked on how quickly it went viral, but thrilled that other people are benefiting from our hug. We loved it."

And while a plastic-covered hug will never be as good as the real thing, it was still comforting — after weeks of lockdowns and other social distancing measures — to be able to hold her mother again, Ellis said. "This allows it to kind of get back to normal. It really gives us a sense of hope that it's not going to be forever," Ellis said. "That physical feeling feels like home, you know, a hug from your mom — it feels so good."—AFP

What's the buzz? Happy locked-down Roman bees to tell all

While most Romans found Italy's coronavirus quarantine a real buzz kill, the city's bees had a field day. Even as Rome endured a recently ended two-month lockdown, some lucky bees residing in hives atop the special forestry unit of Italy's carabinieri were thriving. For three years, members of the carabinieri — the military police which has a special force charged with protecting forests and the environment — have been tracking the approximately 150,000 bees living in three hives on the roof. The coronavirus epidemic offered a unique opportunity for research, as traffic, pollution and noise in the sprawling city virtually stopped overnight in early March after a nationwide quarantine was ordered.

How would the bees react? "They've been happy," said Raffaele Cirone, president of the Italian Apiculture Federation. "We see they've been more numerous and healthy, and those are indications of the nutrition they've been getting," he added. The quality of the bees' honey has visibly improved, Cirone said. Tests show that the bees have been sampling 150 different flowers in the area, compared with the 100 varieties seen before the lockdown. Lack of air pollution means the bees have been able to smell the flowers that attract them from 2 kilometers (1.2 miles) away, double the normal distance, he said. There are an estimated 1,000 to 2,000 hives in Rome, and the city's bees were already happier than their comrades in the countryside, said Cirone, where bees must contend with toxic chemical products used in agricultural production.

On Thursday, two carabinieri beekeepers wearing gloves, hats, veils and

bright yellow protective jackets over their uniforms — with their distinctive red-striped trousers — showed off their bees with hive smokers in hand. One of them, Corporal Gianluca Filoni, said the bees had grown on him after their time together. "I'm not crazy about insects but now I like them," Filoni said, as he showed off a honey and wax-encrusted frame covered by hundreds of bees. The queen, who had been out of sight, suddenly came into view. "There she is!" exclaimed Filoni, before the queen bee buried her way into a new hiding place. "She doesn't like to be exposed," Cirone of the beekeeping federation said his initiation into apiculture began at age six, when his uncle brought him along to watch him take care of his hives, instructing him to stay very still and quiet. It's a memory that still brings shivers, Cirone said. "It was like going into the lion's den and coming out unharmed," said this bee lover, who even sports bees on his tie.

The bee-studying project, managed by Lieutenant Colonel Nicola Giordano of the forestry and environment unit command, includes about 30 other groups in Italy's capital sharing information about their bees. The data from the two-month quarantine period is expected to be ready by summer. Giordano said it was not incongruent for the carabinieri to be paying attention to the tiny, honey-making insects. "It might seem strange but seeing as our institutional mission is the environment, to not take into account the bees, the pollinators, would mean we're not paying attention to biological complexity which is fundamental to our planet," Giordano said. The bee-tracking project, he added, was called "Sentinels of nature." Making honey is not really the point, he said, but still the hives produce about 30 kilograms (65 pounds) of honey. "Aroma of Roma," joked Cirone.—AFP



A beekeeper from the Forestry, Environmental and Agri-Units of the Carabinieri (CUFAA) shows alveolus and bees on a beehive's frame.—AFP



Passengers watch a movie from their cars at a drive-in cinema outside the Mall of Emirates in Dubai on Sunday during the COVID-19 pandemic. — AFP

By default: Virus threatens to derail retail boom for lenders

MUMBAI: Indian lenders are facing a jump in coronavirus-related defaults on credit card dues, personal and vehicle loans, forcing them to set aside hundreds of millions of dollars and take steps like asking sales staff to track down borrowers who have vanished. A near two-month nationwide lockdown to halt the spread of COVID-19 has clobbered India's retail financial segment, seen as the

last bastion for a banking industry that had already raked up more than \$120 billion in bad loans and is ranked the third-worst among 13 major world economies in asset quality.

The provisions for the bad loans are set to significantly shrink profits of privately owned lenders this financial year, while state-owned banks will need yet more government funds to survive, analysts say.

Non-repayment of credit card and personal loans has surged in the last few weeks, according to several senior bankers and industry insiders, increasing the troubles of lenders already struggling with soured loans to larger corporates, and potentially slowing down the country's recovery from the crisis.

"The situation is so bad that even people who can pay are not paying up or are delaying their payments and all of this will snowball into a big problem," said a banker in the retail division of a private bank. ICICI Bank, India's second-biggest private sector bank whose lending is nearly two-thirds retail focused, reported a quarterly profit last week that fell way short of analyst estimates after it set aside 27.25 billion rupees (\$362 million) for the coronavirus. Its shares fell after the results. Banks such as RBL and IndusInd may be hit harder as a weaker deposit franchise makes them more vulnerable.

Sounding caution

Public and private sector banks grew their retail lending rapidly over the past five-six years as India's economy expanded and consumption increased. Retail lending was not only more profitable - rates on credit cards could be as much as 36 percent annually compared to the 9 percent-12 percent that banks typically charge corporates - it also helped banks reduce their exposure to the cyclical risks of industrial businesses.

Since 2015, retail lending has grown at an annual average of nearly 15 percent, at least twice that of corporate lending, as Indians' purchases of overseas trips to gadgets and automobiles were bankrolled by the lenders. Even before the coronavirus struck, that surge drew caution from the banking regulator,

which warned over the last few years that lenders were being too aggressive in the retail segment. But the warnings were ignored by the banks, and by non-banking financial companies (NBFCs), also known as "shadow banks".

Shadow banks account for nearly 20 percent of total loans in India and typically lend to individuals in the informal sector who find it difficult to secure loans from a bank. The hit from the virus has been particularly severe on them. Suman Chowdhury, chief analytical officer at ratings agency Acute Ratings & Research, said he estimated only a fifth of borrowers from shadow banks have paid up in April and May, and expects the same at their next due date as individuals try to conserve cash. If the norms for bad loans-classification aren't relaxed by the central bank in the coming months, such loans at shadow banks will double in the next six months, he added.

India's economy has ground to a standstill amid the lockdown, that, according to several rating agencies and analysts, will lead to the economy contracting in the year ending in March. As revenues dwindle, companies are rushing to cut costs, leading to a spike in job losses that bankers fear will result in more defaults. The Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, an independent think-tank, estimates that during March and April nearly 114 million Indians lost their jobs.

Loan recoveries have also been hamstrung by hundreds of thousands of migrant workers leaving cities as work dried up. "Many are not traceable now and it is proving to be very challenging," a senior executive at a leading NBFC said, adding that people from the firm's sales team were being moved in dozens to focus on debt recovery. — Reuters

Sleepless nights for...

Continued from Page 1

parents' house to reduce the risk of them catching the disease. "They are scared. Sometimes I lie to them that I don't touch the bodies," said the 38-year-old.

Shamim gets a call an hour before the hearse arrives. That is when he becomes nervous. He prepares the relatives, asking them to put on protective suits, gloves and masks for the burial ceremony, before the family says a prayer and lowers the corpse - usually wrapped in cloth or plastic sheeting - into the grave. The mourners then throw their protective gear into the hole before a mechanical earth-mover fills it in.

Some of the bodies of coronavirus victims arrive without relatives to help with the burial, so Shamim said he has often defied orders to stay away. "People just refuse to come help with the burial. What can

you do? I have to step in," he said, describing "heartbreaking" scenes, like when only a wife and a small child came to the funeral of one man.

At a recent burial, Shamim had to find gloves for a small group who had turned up just with plastic bags for protection. He finally found two pairs and gave one glove each to the four people who were lowering the body. "I understand it's never easy to bury the dead, but some families don't follow the rules at all. So many times I have had to beg the hospital workers who accompany the body for gloves," Shamim said.

The gravedigger has been so worried about the pandemic that he has twice been tested for the coronavirus, and paid for one himself of them despite his meager wages. He said he has had help from the cemetery management committee and city authorities, but nothing from the government. "I am way too low for them to bother about."

With the number of victims growing in Delhi and his services in greater demand, Shamim says he worries now if his breathing changes or he has a stomach upset. "I always felt safest around the dead and most vulnerable in the outside world. Now I find it difficult to sleep at night," he said. — AFP

Kiss and go': Back to school...

Continued from Page 1

Most domestic lockdown restrictions ended last Thursday but schools were given extra time because of the difficulty in implementing health protocols among the very young. Instead of escorting their children to class, parents dropped them at "kiss and go" zones, while early childhood centers recorded personal details needed for contact tracing.

Jail for 3 months, KD 5,000 fine for...

Continued from Page 1

submit a draft law stipulating to toughen penalties against human traffickers in Kuwait as part of fighting rampant visa trading in the country.

Meanwhile, 30 societies yesterday called in a statement on the government and the National Assembly to issue a law stipulating to appoint only Kuwaitis in the judicial system, including judges. The statement also called on the supreme judicial council to appoint only citizens in the judicial system that includes judges and public attorneys.

The statement said that "Kuwaitization of the judiciary is a national necessity and a sovereignty requirement in accordance with the constitution". Hundreds of Arabs, mostly Egyptians, have been working as judges and public attorneys in Kuwait since the country's independence. The statement

There were mixed feelings about the return to lessons among some, with Wellington sisters Charlotte and Lucy McKenzie saying the lengthy time at home had been "boring" and "annoying". On the other hand, they appreciated not having to wake up early and said they had more free time than usual.

Their mother Tanya said she had some health concerns but did not believe the government would have reopened schools if there was any risk to children. "I'm a little nervous about COVID making a resurgence," she said. "But having said that, I do trust the information we're getting from the government and from the health department that seems to show we're beating it." — AFP

thanked their great efforts and services.

The Audit Bureau yesterday explained to the speaker and a group of MPs at an informal meeting the details of contracts signed by the government during the coronavirus crisis. MPs said ministries signed contracts worth KD 312 million directly linked to the coronavirus outbreak, mostly by the ministry of health.

MP Ali Al-Deqbasi said information provided by the Bureau is a cause for concern as the Bureau rejected 11 contracts for the health ministry over inflated prices.

Deqbasi said that based on one of the contracts, the ministry wanted to buy a certain disinfectant for KD2,850 per unit as a wholesale whereas the same type is being sold at cooperative societies for just 850 fils a unit.

He said that he sent a series of questions to the minister of health over some contracts which are highly suspicious.

Assembly speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem said the Audit Bureau has rejected 31 percent of contracts submitted by the government since March.

Deaths from virus symptoms...

Continued from Page 1

"Our teams on the ground are seeing how people are being sent away from hospitals, breathing heavily or even collapsing," said Mohammed Alshamaa, Save the Children's director of programs in Yemen. "People are dying because they can't get treatment that would normally save their lives."

Save the Children said on Thursday that authorities in Aden have reported an average of 50 deaths per day since May 7. That's five times higher than the baseline average of 10 deaths a day in more normal times, according to the international aid group. "In the past 24 hours alone, more than 86 deaths have been reported in Aden due to several epidemics and fevers," said Sanad Jamil, who heads the Civil Affairs Department, which issues death certificates in Aden.

Testing for coronavirus is available only at a central public laboratory, but the supply of kits is insufficient. That means many suspected cases have not been tested, according to Yasser Bamellem, a doctor at the Al-Jumhuriya public hospital. Bamellem is in no doubt about what is driving the rising death rate, because before expiring, many displayed symptoms in line with COVID-19 and distinct from other illnesses.

"With the spread of coronavirus, the death rate surged," he told AFP. "We were already fighting against dengue fever and chikungunya, which are transmitted by mosquito bites - but deaths were very few," he explained. "We are on the verge of a catastrophe in Aden."

Yasser Al-Nassiri, director of the private Al-Kubi

Hospital, said that the closure of other hospitals has put pressure on his facility. His staff are receiving 400 patients daily, up from 150. Yemen's health system has all but collapsed since the conflict broke out in 2014, with more than two thirds of the population dependent on aid for survival, according to the UN.

The main theatre of Yemen's war pitches an internationally recognized government, supported by a Saudi-led coalition, against the Iran-backed Houthi rebels. The Houthis stormed the capital Sanaa in Sept 2014 and Aden was set up as the government's interim seat months later. But tensions between southern separatists and the central government have further muddied the waters, with the self-proclaimed Southern Transitional Council declaring self-rule in the south on April 26.

Fighting between pro-government troops and separatist forces on the outskirts of Zinjibar, some 60 km from Aden, has killed more than 20 since early May (those numbers don't feed into the death tolls quoted above). Nassiri said authorities are not paying enough attention to the health crisis, blaming the recent flare-up in fighting in the south.

Aden, home to 550,000 people, has taken virtually no preventive measures against the pandemic. There are no quarantine facilities for those who do test positive in the city. "The situation in Aden has got out of control and is expected to implode further based on the number of daily deaths and cases," Bamellem lamented.

At least three doctors have died since May 7, the local Al-Ayyam daily cited authorities as saying, but without giving the cause of the death. Yemen's internationally recognized government has so far declared only 122 confirmed novel coronavirus cases, including just 18 deaths. Tens of thousands of people, mostly civilians, have been killed in the country's war, which the United Nations views as the world's worst humanitarian crisis. — AFP

Stars

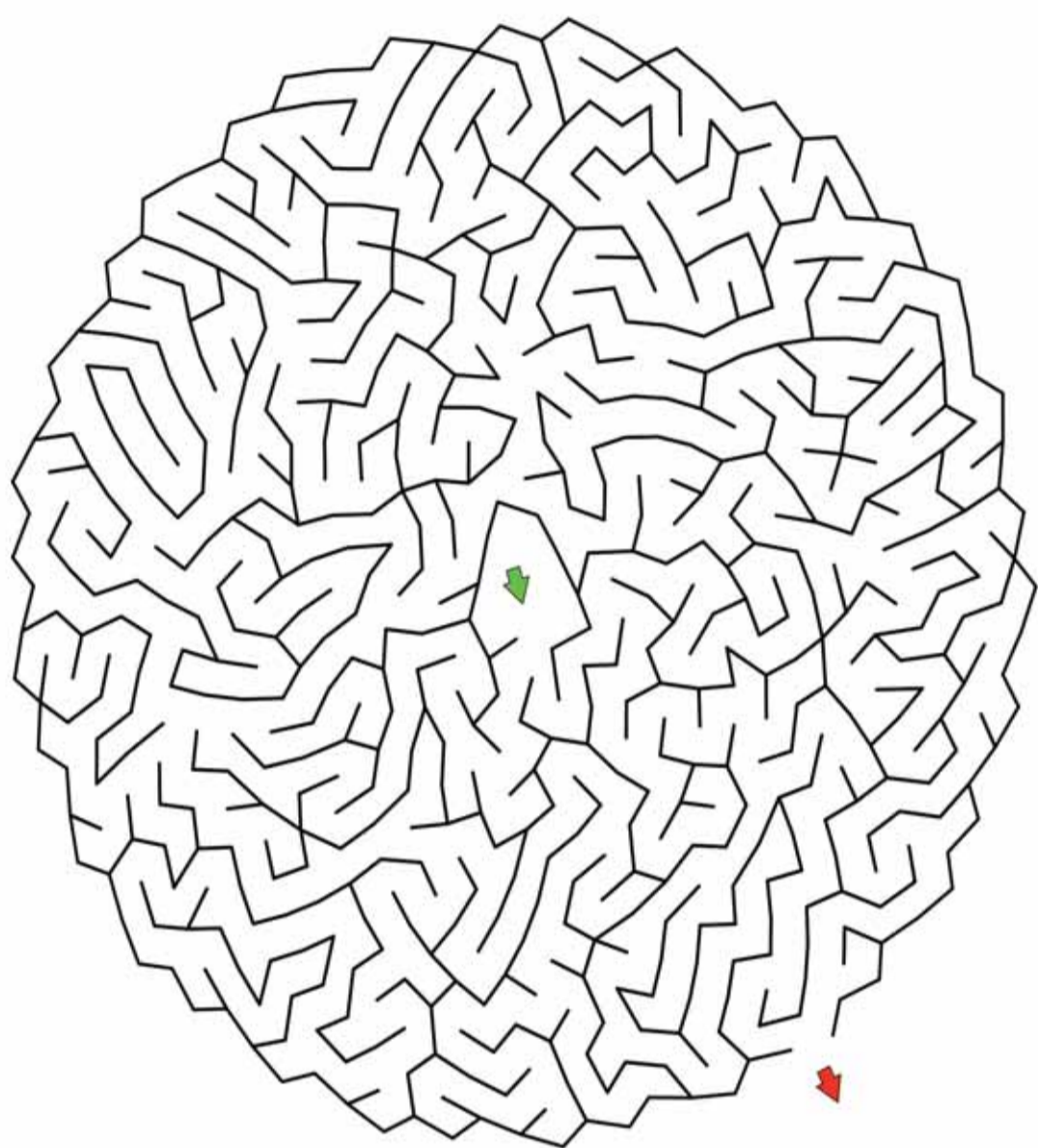
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5	2	4	1	8	3	7	9	6
8	9	6	5	4	7	3	2	1
1	8	9	4	6	5	2	3	7
2	4	7	3	9	1	5	6	8
6	5	3	8	7	2	1	4	9

medium

Find the way



Join the dots



STAR TRACK

Aries (March 21-April 19)
Just when you're feeling good and solid in your plan, Aries, something or someone may step in to rain on your parade. It's as if you're taking one step forward and two steps back. Blame the global pandemic? why not? Even as a feeling of doubt creeps into your personal picture, try not to let these nagging, restrictive energies hold you back.

Taurus (April 20-May 20)
Restriction might weigh heavily on you today, Taurus. Perhaps you're reminded that there are some critical details about health and finance that you need to take care of. Perhaps you'd be wise to adopt a more disciplined approach in your life. Is now a time for some restructuring? Don't be afraid of change, and don't let feelings of responsibility hold you down. Responsibility can be your best friend.

Gemini (May 21-June 20)
Try not to worry too much today, Gemini. Take care of details and work to get things accomplished. When you can check items off your list, you'll feel much better about yourself and the direction you're headed. Keep your eyes open and try not to have tunnel vision on every issue. Give people the benefit of the doubt instead of the third degree. Concentrate on what you need to do.

Cancer (June 21-July 22)
Aspects of your life that you've neglected lately might haunt you on a day like today, Cancer. Make sure to keep up with all your responsibilities. Things may come to a dramatic climax at this time, and you could find yourself at an important crossroads. Nervous energy could send you running around frantically in search of the right path. Don't let indecision keep you from getting where you need to go.

Leo (July 23-August 22)
You might find it easier to connect with others at this time, Leo. It would behoove you to reconnect with friends or family members you may have lost touch with. Their energy can bring an entirely different perspective to your life, which could surprise you with its richness. The aspects are also good for meeting new people. You'll have to do it from a safe distance, of course, but it's still possible!

Virgo (August 23-September 22)
Disciplined action is the best way to go about your day, Virgo. Stay focused on your path. You can accomplish many tasks at the same time if you play your cards right today. Remember, there's a difference between discipline and getting bogged down with details. Certain people will always make you worry, but don't let their negative energy get in the way of your progress.

Libra (September 23-October 22)
Decisions will be even more difficult to make than usual today, Libra. On the one hand, you may feel a need to stabilize and specialize, while on the other hand, it's hard to deny the energy raging in a million different directions as you crave new experiences and interactions. Try to adopt a plan that combines both of these energies. Nervous energy keeps you moving, and social distancing keeps you focused.

Scorpio (October 23-November 21)
Feeling solidly grounded might also have you feeling less than energetic about getting the ball rolling, Scorpio. Don't be surprised if your sense of restriction and duty are weighing you down. Rest and reflection are very important in the natural cycle. Don't assume that you always need to be on the go in order to make progress. Put your warring nature aside today and take it easy.

Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)
Things will go more and more in your favor over the next four weeks, Sagittarius, although today they might seem slow to get moving. If your body feels stressed or tense, that lack of get-up-and-go is understandable. Don't worry about your missing motivation. With the world on pause right now, many people are experiencing this. The feeling will pass and you'll be your old self again in no time.

Capricorn (December 22-January 19)
Discipline and duty have been major themes for you lately, Capricorn. It might seem as if someone has put the brakes on your current plan. Try not to see this as negative. In reality, now is an important time for you to slow down and think ahead. Many givens are shrouded in uncertainty these days. Use this period to organize your scattered energy. Focus and streamline your life while nothing else is going on.

Aquarius (January 20- February 18)
Your ego and physical vitality should experience a boost today, Aquarius. Hone in on the solid, grounding energy that's encouraging you to come to terms with your emotions. Be aware of the fact that your recent gloomy attitude may be weighing heavily on the ones you love. Be careful that you aren't hurting someone just because you know that they'll forgive you.

Pisces (February 19-March 20)
It might be hard to find the exact direction you're looking for today, Pisces. Maybe there's a strong force urging you to slow down and be more practical with your energy. This may not be the advice you want to hear, but it's probably the advice you need to follow. Remember that the world doesn't revolve around you, regardless of how much you might like to think it does. Others have problems of their own these days.

Word Search

Superman

Word Search

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

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

KRYPTON

LANE

LEX

LOIS

LUTHOR

METROPOLIS

PLANET

POWERS

RED

STEEL

STRENGTH

TIGHTS

TRUNKS

XRAY

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Sports

Photo of the day



WYOMING: Michelle Parker flanks a turn in front of the Tetons Mountain Range in Wyoming, USA. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

McIlroy, Johnson triumph as charity match offers 'normalcy'

NEW YORK: A tie-break win for world number one Rory McIlroy and teammate Dustin Johnson at the Driving Relief two-on-two charity skins match Sunday injected suspense to a course absent of fans and applause in the COVID-19 era.

Wearing microphones that captured their smack talk and frustrations, caddie-less competitors McIlroy and Johnson faced off against Rickie Fowler and Matthew Wolff, carrying their own clubs and adhering to social distancing procedures after undergoing a battery of tests and screenings.

Eager golf fans tuned in for one of the rare few live televised events, and were treated to a bit of mild trash talk early on, as McIlroy teased his 21-year-old opponent Wolff after sinking a putt for par four on the second hole.

"I think you forget I've won two FedEx Cups that totaled at \$25 million," said McIlroy. "Doesn't faze me, youngster." That bravado was eventually tempered, however, as Fowler's seven birdies put pressure on the world number one and Johnson, the heavily favoured pair who boast five majors titles between them.

The competition came down to a closest-to-the-hole tiebreak, in which McIlroy clinched the victory despite an admirable 120-yard wedge shot from Wolff, letting out a whoop and offering his teammate an "air-five."

"These Seminole greens, the ball can do funny things when you think it's in a good place," said McIlroy, who basked in the "normalcy" of being back in competition. "It's been awesome and it's nice to get back on the golf course."

Raising more than \$5.5 million through sponsors and donations for COVID-19 relief, the competition quickly trended on social media, as golf-starved fans reveled in seeing their favourite players compete in unique circumstances.

"Does DJ (Dustin Johnson) legitimately not know how to carry a golf bag anymore or something?" tweeted @14Thaddeus14, as images of the 2016 U.S. Open champ's clubs hanging haphazardly from his shoulder prompted good-natured ribbing on Twitter. Wolff's tie-dyed sneakers and handlebar mustache and Fowler's pantomime gestures to an imaginary crowd proved that the proceedings were anything but business as usual, with comedic actor Bill Murray showing off his quarantine snacks during a Skype dial-in to the telecast. —Reuters

Trump says golf stars 'are all great people' despite Rory McIlroy blast

Trump doesn't hold a grudge against players who are turned off by his abrasive style

LOS ANGELES: Donald Trump doesn't expect to be teeing it up anytime soon with Rory McIlroy, who called out the US president earlier in the week for his controversial leadership.

McIlroy, the No. 1 player in the world, blasted his former golfing partner Trump on a podcast episode for the latter's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. Trump, an avid golfer, and McIlroy played a round together three years ago in Florida.

"We're in the midst of something that's pretty serious right now, and the fact that he's trying to politicize it and make it a campaign rally, saying that (the United States) administers the most tests in the world like it's a contest," McIlroy said.

"It's just not the way a leader should act, and there is a bit of diplomacy that you need to show, and I just don't think he's shown that, especially in these times." Asked on Sunday during a video link interview with NBC television how he felt about the criticism he sometimes receives from players, Trump said he doesn't expect them all to like him.

"A lot of them are very political. Some of them like my politics and some don't. The ones that don't, I don't see as much," Trump told NBC during the broadcast of a golf tournament in Florida that included McIlroy and three others playing for charity.

But Trump said he doesn't hold a grudge against players who are turned off by his abrasive style. "I know so many of the tour players. I can't think of anyone I don't like, and I can't say that in life. When you meet tour players, they are

all great people," he said.

The 31-year-old McIlroy was getting back into the swing of things Sunday with fellow pros Dustin Johnson, Rickie Fowler and Matthew Wolff after a two-month break due to the coronavirus pandemic.

They are shaking off the golf rust to raise money for COVID-19 relief and help introduce new safety guidelines from the PGA. The Taylor Made Driving Relief is a forerunner to the PGA's scheduled official return in June with a tournament in Republican-run Texas that will take place without spectators.

The Texas event will be followed by three other spectator-less tournaments in which the players will be forced to undergo COVID-19 testing and temperature screenings. In his phone call to NBC, Trump put out mixed signals on how sports should proceed when it comes to having fans in attendance. He wants golf events like the Masters to return with spectators "practically standing on top of each

other," but in the next breath said last week's closed-door mixed martial arts card in Florida didn't miss the fans.

"You saw the UFC the other night, they had really just a lighted ring in the middle of an empty arena, and I am not sure that so many people missed the fans. I don't think so in that particular case," he said.

Trump declined to answer a question about the rationale behind testing million-dollar athletes to play sports when many Americans still don't have access to reliable coronavirus tests.



UFC doesn't miss fans



JUNO BEACH, FLORIDA: Rory McIlroy of the American Nurses Foundation team plays a shot from a bunker on the 16th hole during the TaylorMade Driving Relief Supported By UnitedHealth Group on May 17, 2020 at Seminole Golf Club in Juno Beach, Florida. —AFP

But the president, who refuses to wear a protective mask, hinted that sports fans might be able to get tests. "The athletes will be tested very carefully... If people want to go, they can be tested very carefully," he said.

"When you have all of those thousands, tens of thousands of people going to your majors and going to golf tournaments, we want them to have the same experience. We don't want them to be having to wear masks."

Trump said sports needs to get back as quickly as possible for the "psyche" of American people. "We want to get sports back," he said. "We miss sports, we need sports in terms of the psyche — psyche of our country — and that's what we're doing."

On Sunday, McIlroy won the closest to the pin challenge on a playoff hole to give himself and teammate Johnson an 11-7 win over Fowler and Wolff at Seminole Golf Club. Overall, the event raised more than \$5.5 million for charity. —AFP

Fahad balances training, studying without sacrificing either

KUWAIT: Acclaimed athlete Fahad Al Musallam prioritizes his studies throughout the holy month of Ramadan, without neglecting his fitness. As a professional athlete, he specializes in the field of motocross. A sport where endurance and training required to complete the multi-day course races is staggering. In order to succeed, he must maintain a high level of fitness throughout the year.

But he's also a college student. And with Ramadan this year, he's had to place a greater emphasis on balancing his athletic and scholastic duties. "I just make sure not to exercise at all before breaking my fast," said Fahad Al Musallam. "Good study requires a lot of energy which means I don't workout until I've completed my work for the day." He also noted how he could workout

before iftar, but that routine would only last a few days before the excessive effort took its toll.

His classes have moved into e-learning, with him showing up for them online. He attends his classes in the morning, and exercises in the evening. "I workout before suhour." He said. This is how I maintain my energy for studies."

He also makes sure to give himself time to play. He utilizes social media to keep in touch with classmates. He also relaxes before iftar by gaming, which acts as his decompression time.

Fahad Al Musallam lives in Kuwait City, Kuwait. To find out more about Fahad Al Musallam, visit @RedBullKuwait on Instagram and Twitter, and @RedBull on Facebook, or visit <https://www.redbull.com/mean/athlete/fahad-al-musallam>



Sports

Sky Germany attracts record audience for Bundesliga restart

German league without fans like 'old man's' football: Mueller

BERLIN: The restart of the Bundesliga behind locked doors on Saturday attracted over six million viewers watching in Germany, a new record for broadcasters Sky, according to specialist website DWDL.de.

When the German league resumed on Saturday afternoon after a two-month break due to the coronavirus, Sky had 3.68 million viewers watching the matches on its subscription TV channels in Germany.

The domestic figure is more than double the usual audience for a typical round of Saturday matches. In addition, 2.45 million viewers watched the 'Konferenz' - a simultaneous live broadcast of the five afternoon games, where coverage moved from stadium to stadium.

In the day's main game, Erling Braut Haaland scored the first Bundesliga goal since mid-March to help Borussia Dortmund rout rivals Schalke 4-0 and stay in the title race with Bayern Munich, who play Union Berlin away on Sunday.

A spokesman for the German Football League (DFL) told AFP the matches were televised by more than 70 broadcasters worldwide, all on previously-agreed deals. With Bundesliga matches played behind closed doors in near-empty stadiums, Sky Germany broadcast the 'Konferenz' on its free-to-view Sports News Channel.

The idea was to discourage fans in Germany from meeting up to watch matches in places with a Sky subscription. When Saturday afternoon's games kicked-off, Sky Germany had a market

share of 27.4 percent on their pay-to-view channels and 18.2 percent on their free channel.

In the target group of 14-49 year olds, the total market share was "over 60 percent", according to DWDL.de on Sunday, a record for Sky Germany. Having been granted permission to restart after the German government approved the league's strict hygiene guidelines, the Bundesliga is the first top European league to resume.

There are hopes the leagues in Italy, Spain and England can restart next month while the French league season has already been scrapped.

Meanwhile, Thomas Mueller joked that the Bundesliga without fans feels like "old man's football, 7pm, under floodlights" after Bayern Munich brushed aside Union Berlin 2-0 behind closed doors on Sunday.

A first-half Robert Lewandowski penalty and a late Benjamin Pavard header sealed Bayern's win in front of empty terraces in Berlin.

The result leaves defending champions Bayern four points clear as the German league restarted this weekend after a two-month hiatus due to the COVID-19 virus. However, Mueller admitted it was strange to play Union behind closed doors at their compact Alten Foerster stadium, which is usually packed with 22,000 passionate home fans.

"It felt a bit like the atmosphere you get for old man's football, 7pm, under floodlights, but as soon as the ball started to roll, the game took our focus," said Mueller. The Bundesliga became the

'phase 0' as two of Spain's worst-hit regions by coronavirus.

"It is a ministerial decision. It was very important that all teams could train in the same way," said Javier Tebas, the president of La Liga, on Sunday.

Espanyol, Leganes, Getafe and Real Valladolid will also be given special permission to do training in larger groups.

The move comes as a boost to La Liga's hopes of restarting the season in the middle of June and following the lead of Germany's Bundesliga, which staged games behind closed doors on Saturday.

Teams in the top two divisions in Spain have already returned to their training grounds this month, with players working individually as part of La Liga's staggered programme, which includes regular testing and strict medical protocol.

Tebas has circled June 12 as the ideal date for matches to return but admitted the exact timing will depend on the health authorities in Spain and the trajectory of the virus.

Jovanovic said mental health issues, not alcohol or drugs, were behind the voluntarily move.

"The reason he decided to go to rehab was because of the absence rugby league left in his life when we had to go into isolation. You could just see he was lost," she told the Sydney Morning Herald.

"He would just sit around, be in deep thought and you could see he didn't want to do anything. He lost some of his drive.

"The whole not getting up for training, the social environment of being with the boys, the happiness that training gives and doing what always does - that was a big part that was missing. He just kept saying, 'I just want to play football'."

The 27-year-old flyer, who played all three matches in the 2018 State of Origin series, has had alcohol-related issues in the past that cost him contracts at two National Rugby League

Belgium international had appeared to kiss Grujic on the cheek on Saturday before Hertha scored three quick goals in a 3-0 win against Hoffenheim.

"I apologize for putting my hands on (Grujic's) face," Boyata wrote on Instagram, explaining that "it wasn't a kiss" or "a celebration" when he grabbed the Serbia midfielder. "I was giving him instructions about a set piece.

"We must definitely be careful now that we play under this situation," added the 29-year-old. "We have to adapt our way to play or celebrate." Earlier this month, Hertha had already suspended ex-Chelsea forward Salomon Kalou for posting a video of him shaking hands with team-mates in the dressing room before training.

"Football has an extreme function to be a role model, so we should stick to our instructions and pay attention to it next week," Soeder told broadcaster Sport1 on Sunday.

Also on Saturday, some Borussia Moenchengladbach players hugged after their team scored two early goals in the 3-1 victory at Eintracht Frankfurt. "The players must also obey the rules," added Soeder.

The German Football League

(DFL) has said it would not sanction any players for not sticking to the guidelines at the weekend - but that could change.

Hertha coach Bruno Labbadia defended his players, who hugged in celebration after their goals, insisting

it is part of the game.

"We've been tested so many times that we can allow it," said Labbadia, who was taking charge of Hertha for the first time. "If you can't celebrate anymore, the whole thing breaks down." —AFP



LEIPZIG: Sky tv host Esther Sedlaczek wears a face mask as she interviews a player of Leipzig after the German first division Bundesliga football match RB Leipzig v SC Freiburg in Leipzig, eastern Germany as the season resumed following a two-month absence due to the novel coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic. —AFP

first top European league to resume this weekend, using draconian hygiene guidelines, regular testing of players and insisting on games in near-empty stadiums.

Hugging, embracing and handshakes were also banned. "There were a few butterflies before the restart, wondering how it would go, like before the first game of the season in August," said Mueller. "I wasn't worried about anything going

wrong, everything was explained clearly to us.

"Union Berlin, just like us, were well prepared, no handshakes before kick-off etc." Mueller said the defending champions were just happy to win their first game after the restart to keep them on course for an eighth consecutive league title. "We came here with the goal of getting the three points," added Mueller. "We had a bit more security after the second goal." —AFP

La Liga clubs given permission to expand into group training

MADRID: La Liga have told clubs they will be able to increase training to involve groups of up to 10 players yesterday as teams take another step towards the planned resumption of the season next month.

The Spanish government has announced protocol that will allow training sessions to be expanded by all clubs, even those belonging to areas that are further behind in the country's de-escalation programme.

It means teams like Real Madrid, Barcelona and Atletico Madrid will be able to train in groups of 10, despite both Madrid and Catalonia remaining in

Sport shutdown sent 'Jimmy the Jet' into rehab

SYDNEY: New South Wales and South Sydney Rabbitohs back James Roberts checked into rehab because the coronavirus shutdown of sport left such a big hole in his life, his partner told Australian media yesterday.

Health experts have warned that a prolonged isolation during the COVID-19 crisis could take a major mental toll on athletes as their livelihoods and self-esteem are intrinsically linked to competition.

Pacy centre Roberts, nicknamed 'Jimmy the Jet', checked into the clinic last week and Anna

Hertha player denies 'kiss'

BERLIN: Hertha Berlin defender Dedryck Boyata apologised on Sunday for his up-close encounter with Marko Grujic but denied kissing his team-mate after a senior German politician criticised players for breaching the league's strict hygiene protocol.

The German Bundesliga restarted on Saturday after a two-month break due to the coronavirus pandemic with clubs having agreed to draconian hygiene guidelines in a plan approved by the German government.

However, Bavarian state minister Markus Soeder said he expected the league to "tighten up" instructions on how to celebrate goals after some players hugged with team-mates. Players were told to avoid contact whenever possible, especially when celebrating goals.

That was ignored on a few occasions although a repentant Boyata said he was simply uttering instructions to Grujic at a corner. The

Full training delayed in Italy as teams wrangle over medical rules

ROME: The start of full training at Italy's professional soccer clubs has been postponed from Monday as they continue to wrangle over the government's medical rules for dealing with the coronavirus.

The Gazzetta dello Sport, state broadcaster Rai and other media all said that the government's technical-scientific committee had not ratified the rules which were announced last week but then questioned by the Serie A clubs and the Italian Football Federation (FIGC).

Several clubs had already decided either to continue with individual training or, at the most, divide players into small groups which would respect social distancing measures.

Serie A clubs hope to resume the league, which has been suspended since March 9, on June 13 but have been locked in to-and-fro discussions with the government over how to do so safely.

The main sticking-point is the government's insistence that, if a player tests positive, the whole squad must go into quarantine for 14 days. The clubs argue that isolating the player involved would be sufficient.

"It is obvious that this would not allow us to finish the championship by August because, if there were 2-3 infected in one or two teams, everything would be systematically blocked for a couple of weeks," Cagliari president Tommaso Giulin told Radio Super Sound.

"Since this has a good chance of happening, it would mean that 80% to 90% of us would not be able to finish by August 2... We are trying, we need less rigidity and within the next few days we will know something more."

The clubs are also opposed to the stipulation that each squad, including coaching and backup staff, undergo a training camp in complete isolation before the league restarts. They said this would create huge logistical problems.

Udinese's technical director Pierpaolo Marino said the uncertainty had made the June 13 start date unrealistic and that more training time was needed.

"It would be madness for footballers and clubs," he told Rai.

"We still don't know if from tomorrow we can train in groups or individually, as the current guidelines are not fully applicable. If the league resumes on 13 June, there will be a very high risk of injury.

"The German championship restarted yesterday after seven weeks of training and several players have already been injured."

Earlier, Inter Milan said that the entire squad and staff had given negative results in the most recent round of tests.

"All of the results from Friday's medical tests on the club's players, coaching staff, management staff and the remainder of the team group have returned as negative," the club said. —Reuters



SINSHEIM: Hertha's Belgian defender Dedryck Boyata (L) talks to teammate Serbian midfielder Marko Grujic during the German first division Bundesliga football match TSG 1899 Hoffenheim v Hertha Berlin on May 16, 2020 in Sinsheim south-western Germany. —AFP

18 Trump says golf stars 'are all great people' despite Rory McIlroy blast



19 Sky Germany attracts record audience for Bundesliga restart



19 Hertha defender Dedryck Boyata denies 'kiss'



Leaders Bayern brush Union aside



BERLIN: Bayern Munich's German midfielder Serge Gnabry (R) attempts to score past Union Berlin's Polish goalkeeper Rafal Gikiewicz during the German first division Bundesliga football match FC Union Berlin v FC Bayern Munich on May 17, 2020 in Berlin. — AFP

BERLIN: Robert Lewandowski bagged his 26th league goal this season as leaders Bayern Munich resumed their Bundesliga title chase with a 2-0 win at Union Berlin behind closed doors in their first match in two months on Sunday.

Lewandowski netted a first-half penalty and defender Benjamin Pavard scored a late header for Bayern in Berlin. The Bundesliga on Saturday became the first top European league to restart during the coronavirus pandemic.

Poland star Lewandowski, who missed two games with injury before the league was interrupted in mid-March, reached 40 goals for the campaign in all competitions as Bayern restored their four-point lead over Borussia Dortmund.

Dortmund, who thrashed Schalke 4-0 in the Ruhr derby on Saturday, host Bayern in a pivotal fixture on May 26, another game that will be behind closed doors in line with the league's strict hygiene guidelines.

"I have to say, each minute is very long when there are no fans and no noise," said Bayern captain Manuel Neuer. "It was a different atmosphere to what you would expect at the Alten Forsterei, but, okay, it's about motivation and attitude. "We still have a bit of

work to do, but are happy to have dominated the game and can head home with the three points."

Union had shocked previous leaders Dortmund and Borussia Moenchengladbach earlier in the season, backed by passionate home support at their Alten Forsterei stadium.

With players' voices echoing around the empty ground, Thomas Mueller looked to have given Bayern the lead on 18 minutes only for the goal to be disallowed for offside.

Bayern eventually broke through when Union defender Neven Subotic fouled Leon Goretzka in the area on 38 minutes, with Lewandowski stepping up to slot home the resulting penalty.

Bayern coach Hansi Flick brought on French winger Kingsley Coman for his 100th Bundesliga appearance as the visitors sought to make the points safe.

It was Coman's countryman Pavard who grabbed the second goal on 80 minutes when he headed a Joshua Kimmich corner inside the far post. Saturday's

restart attracted over six million viewers in Germany, a new record for broadcasters Sky, according to specialist website DWDL.de.

And while millions tuned in to watch, a significant portion of match-going supporters are livid at the idea of games going ahead without the noisy backdrop provided by German fans.

On Saturday, Augsburg fans left a banner inside their team's ground which read "Football gives life — your business is sick".

Second-division St Pauli meanwhile published a picture on Twitter of a banner that read "Football lives through its fans! Without you, it's all nothing!"

With clubs having agreed to draconian hygiene guidelines in a plan approved by the German government, Hertha Berlin defender Dedryck Boyata denied planting a kiss on team-mate Marko Grujic during their 3-0 win over Hoffenheim.

"I apologize for putting my hands on (Grujic's) face," Boyata wrote on Instagram, explaining that "it

wasn't a kiss" or "a celebration" when he grabbed the Serbia midfielder.

"I was giving him instructions about a set piece." "We must definitely be careful now that we play under this situation," he added. In Cologne, striker Mark Uth said that the absence of fans was no excuse for throwing away a two-goal lead in Sunday's early game — a 2-2 draw with struggling Mainz.

"If you're up 2-0, you have to finish things off — with or without spectators," fumed goalscorer Uth. The hosts took an early lead when Uth converted a penalty with just six minutes gone and Florian Kainz added a second when he headed home a cross with just over half an hour left.

Replacement striker Taiwo Awoniyi, who had only been on for five minutes, tapped home from close range for his first Bundesliga goal to give Mainz hope.

Cameroon midfielder Pierre Kunde then earned a point for Mainz when he beat two defenders and poked the ball past goalkeeper Timo Horn to equalise on 72 minutes.

"It was like street football, a huge game for us," said Mainz sports director Rouven Schroeder. "For the first game after so many weeks, it was really good. The guys didn't want to be left behind." — AFP



Fans protest 'ghost games'

NASCAR returns to sound of silence

NEW YORK: Kevin Harvick and NASCAR both celebrated victories on Sunday as the stock car series returned to live racing from a two-month novel coronavirus forced hiatus at an empty Darlington Raceway. While the day unfolded with none of the bells and whistles that have made NASCAR North America's most popular motor sport, on the track the race delivered as promised with plenty of bumper-to-bumper action.

Harvick, winner of the 2007 Daytona 500, produced a masterful drive to pull away after a late restart to cross 2.15 seconds clear of Alex Bowman and Kurt Busch to collect his 50th career Cup win.

The 44-year-old driver celebrated his victory in what

has become typical NASCAR fashion with some tire burning donuts that would normally spark a massive roar of approval from the stands but in this race there was no one to witness the show.

Not even the growl from 40 V8 stock car engines could make up for the silence as drivers exited the track to muffled applause from pit crews and officials.

"I didn't think it was going to be that much different and then we won the race and it is dead silent out here, so we miss the fans," said a bewildered Harvick, standing alone on the track. "It is weird just because there is nobody up there."

"Usually you get out of the car and the crowd is screaming and yelling ... today it was like, well, I don't know really what to do here. "We got done, everybody left." For U.S. sports fans the Real Heroes 400 was the highlight of a weekend that saw sport slowly come back to life after most events were shuttered mid-March by the COVID-19 pandemic that has claimed over 88,000 American lives. Following an Ultimate Fighting Champi-

onship card aired live from an empty arena in Jacksonville, Florida on Saturday, sport starved fans had their choice on Sunday of a charity skins game featuring golf greats Rory McIlroy and Dustin Johnson, Professional Bull Riding and NASCAR.

US President Donald Trump said in an interview with NBC Sports during the skins broadcast that sport was a part of "the psyche of our country".

As the NBA, NHL and MLB work through scenarios that could get them playing again, NASCAR is ready to go — Sunday's race the first of 20 taking place across seven Southern states over 36 days.

NASCAR will be back at Darlington Raceway on Wednesday for the second Cup race in four days. While the action on the track was familiar, everything else was uncharted.

Teams, each allowed 16 members, arrived in the morning at designated times and temperatures were screened before entering the infield. Only 900 essential personnel were approved to be inside the gates.

With limited crew members drivers were left to do some of the more mundane chores, such as filling water bottles and making lunch, that might have otherwise fallen to staff.

When called to the track, drivers, crews and officials wore face masks. With no practice or qualifying places on the starting grid were set by a random draw with Brad Keselowski on pole.

NASCAR's oldest speedway on the Cup circuit is known as the "Track Too Tough to Tame" and proved to be just that for Ricky Stenhouse Jr., who had his return come to an abrupt end as he slammed into the wall on the opening lap.

Otherwise racing was free of major wrecks as drivers quickly settled into their routines. "I have been around this deal for a long time and this is not like anything I have experienced," said Harvick.

"It is very similar to coming back after 9/11 but that day had 100,000 fans in the stands and now you have no fans." — Reuters