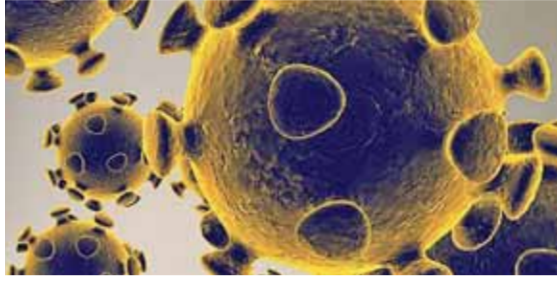




8 Virus pushes science and its controversies center stage



16 Empty middle seat? Depends on which country you are flying in



18 Kohli says father refused to bribe way into team



Ramadan KAREEM

Fajr	03:23
Dhuhr	11:44
Asr	15:20
Maghrib	18:36
Isha	20:04



Cabinet reviews population plan; remittance tax urged

Eid prayers at home: Awqaf • UAE allows expats to return • Qatar confirms virus in jail

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The Council of Ministers yesterday reviewed a plan to rectify an imbalance in the population structure where expats form an overwhelming majority and asked a specialized panel to continue its work. The plan and recommendations were presented by the higher committee for dealing with the distortion in the population structure, which was asked by the Cabinet to continue with procedures and steps to implement recommendations on this issue.

The Cabinet statement provided no details on the nature of the recommendations or the conclusions of the higher committee, but it asked the higher committee to coordinate with various state bodies "to resolve the existing situation in order to achieve the required goals". At present, expats form some 70 percent of the country's population (3.35 million),

while Kuwaitis number just 1.45 million or 30 percent of the population.

The coronavirus crisis has highlighted the difficulty of handling large numbers of expatriates, a majority of them low-paid Arab and Asian laborers who are living under dire and unhealthy conditions that were cited as the main reason for the spread of the deadly disease among foreigners. The government has started a clampdown on visa traders and arrested dozens of Kuwaitis and their expat assistants, and several cases are being investigated by the public prosecution.

MPs in the past few days have submitted bills calling to stop appointing expats in government jobs and to terminate the services of some 100,000 expat employees in government agencies within a year. Minister of State for Municipality Affairs Waleed Al-Jassem has issued a decision halting all

expat appointments in the Municipality and calling to terminate the services of expats already employed there.

In its meeting, the Council of Ministers also decided to double the amount of the so-called labor support which the government pays to all citizens who opt for private sector jobs. The Cabinet also said the government will pay any reduction in the salaries of Kuwaitis in the private sector. MP Abdullah Al-Kandari criticized the decision, saying it effectively allows private sector employers to cut salaries of their staff.

Head of the manpower resources committee MP Khalil Al-Saleh called on the Assembly yesterday to give priority to approving a draft law that calls to impose up to a five percent tax on the remittances of expatriates. Saleh said the bill had been approved by the financial and economic affairs committee and has

been waiting for its turn on the agenda of the National Assembly. He said the bill is important since it provides another source of income for the budget, as expat remittances have exceeded KD 4.2 billion. A number of MPs have been pressing to approve the bill despite a warning by the Central Bank and the finance ministry that the bill is counterproductive and will encourage a black market.

Meanwhile, the ministry of awqaf said Monday that Eid al-Fitr prayers are preferably to be performed in their format at home instead of mosques due to the coronavirus pandemic. The ministry surveyed by phone the opinions of several Muslim scholars who agreed that the audible prayers consisting of two rakats can be performed at home without the post-prayer sermon, according to a statement by the ministry's fatwa (religious opinion) department.

Continued on Page 16

Trump taking HCQ despite FDA warning

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump on Monday made the surprise announcement that he is taking hydroxychloroquine, an anti-malaria drug that his own government experts say is not suitable for fighting the novel coronavirus. Trump, noting that he has tested negative for the virus and shows no symptoms, said he'd been taking the drug as a preventative measure for about a week and a half. "I take a pill every day," he said, adding that he combines this with zinc. Asked why, he said: "Because I think it's good. I've heard a lot of good stories."

Trump has shown interest for weeks in promoting the use of hydroxychloroquine, even if some doctors think it does not work for coronavirus patients and US government regulators warn it has "not been shown to be safe." House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said it's "not a good idea"

for Trump to be taking the drug as a potential treatment for the coronavirus.

"I would rather he not be taking something that has not been approved by the scientists, especially in his age group and in his, shall we say, weight group, which is morbidly obese, they say," Pelosi said during an appearance on CNN's "Anderson Cooper 360". "So, I think that it's not a good idea," she added. Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer called Trump's decision to take the drug "reckless". "It gives people false hope, has people avoid real medical attention, and can actually cause them trouble. It is just dangerous what he did," Schumer said on MSNBC.

Trump's latest remarks came out of the blue, immediately grabbing headlines on a day when US deaths from COVID-19 topped 90,000 people – almost a third of the total world toll. "You'd be surprised at how many people are taking it, especially the frontline workers, before you catch it. The frontline workers – many, many are taking it. I happen to be taking it," he let slip to reporters attending a White House meeting devoted to the struggling restaurant industry. "I'm taking it, hydroxychloroquine, right now, yeah. A couple of weeks ago, I started taking it," he said.

Continued on Page 16

New drug could stop pandemic without vaccine

BEIJING: A Chinese laboratory has been developing a drug it believes has the power to bring the coronavirus pandemic to a halt. The outbreak first emerged in China late last year before spreading across the world, prompting an international race to find treatments and vaccines. A drug being tested by scientists at China's prestigious Peking University could not only shorten the recovery time for those infected, but even offer short-term immunity from the virus, researchers say.

Sunney Xie, director of the university's Beijing Advanced Innovation Center for Genomics, told AFP that the drug has been successful at the animal testing stage. "When we injected neutralizing antibodies into infected mice, after five days the viral load was reduced by a factor of 2,500," said Xie. "That means this potential drug has (a) therapeutic effect."

The drug uses neutralizing antibodies – produced by the human immune system to prevent the virus infecting cells – which Xie's team isolated from the blood of 60 recovered patients. A study on the team's research, published Sunday in the scientific journal Cell, suggests that using the antibodies provides

Continued on Page 16

US threatens to leave WHO over response

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump has threatened to pull the US out of the World Health Organization, accusing it of botching the global coronavirus response and of being a "puppet of China". The American leader has been locked in a bitter spat with Beijing, alleging it covered up the initial outbreak in central China late last year before the disease unleashed death and economic devastation across the planet.

More than 317,000 people have died of COVID-19 out of nearly 4.8 million infections worldwide, and governments are scrambling to contain the virus while seeking ways to resuscitate their hammered economies. With more fatalities and cases in the United States than any other country by far, under-pressure Trump has blamed the WHO for not doing enough to combat its initial spread.

"They're a puppet of China, they're China-centric to put it nicer," he said on Monday at the White House. "They gave us a lot of bad advice." Trump had already suspended US funding to the UN body, and after his White House comments, he tweeted a letter he had sent to WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus threatening to make that freeze permanent. "It is clear the repeated missteps by you and your organization in responding to the pandemic have been extremely costly for the world," the letter said.

Continued on Page 16

CONDOLENCES

Kuwait Times Editor-in-Chief,
management and staff convey their
deepest condolences to

Al-Mulla Family

on the sad
demise of

Abdullah Abdurraheem
Mohammed Al-Mulla

May Allah Almighty bestow His mercy on him

Local

Kuwait govt reviews Central Bank's strategy on citizens' quality training

Cabinet touts SAB scrutiny over COVID-19 response spending

In My View

Dog walking responsibilities

By Nawara Fattahova

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Walking during the curfew's exercise hours is one of the few pleasures afforded to everyone living under the lockdown. It's also gladdening to see an increase in the number of pet owners and those out walking their dogs during the outdoor time. That pleasure can be ruined, however, when one steps in the poo of a pet dog, left on the street by an irresponsible owner.

In the last decade, Kuwait's attitude toward owning pets and especially dogs has changed considerably, and many individuals and families now keep a dog in their home. But some still do not understand the basic rules and etiquettes of dog walking, and especially of cleaning up after their beloved pets. Stepping in poo is an all too common likelihood nowadays, especially now during the pandemic and total curfew, when everyone is out at the same time and walking on the same streets in the neighborhood.

Walk around many neighborhoods at the end of the curfew hour and you will find piles of dog feces in the middle of the street, on the pavement, in the grass, at the edge of the road and sometimes even in the parking lots. Too many dog owners simply don't care to clean up after their dog, and leave the waste in public places.

In Europe, the US and other countries, such anti-social and irresponsible behavior is not acceptable, and there are fines for those who fail to clean up after their pets. Also, there are trash bins in all public areas and near sidewalks and often stands with plastic gloves so dog owners can use to remove the waste from the road hygienically.

All of this is still not available in Kuwait in the present time. And people are not so dedicated to keep public places clean, so they don't carry garbage bags to clean the waste of their pets. Also, they don't feel this is an obligation as they leave it on the public cleaners who collect garbage from streets.

But as the popularity of pet ownership grows in Kuwait, there needs to be regulations with regards to the responsibilities of pet ownership. Regulations on littering in public places and other similar rules related to preserving cleanliness of public places can be applied. It is a simple matter of carrying a few plastic trash bags in the pocket and cleaning up afterwards. This will continue to encourage dog ownership in Kuwait, maintain the cleanliness and health of Kuwait's streets and public spaces and



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah (center) chairs the cabinet's meeting. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Kuwait Government Monday reviewed a Central Bank's strategy aimed at providing high-quality training for citizens to work in the banking and financial sectors. Around 130 Kuwaiti citizens benefit from this training every year, Deputy Premier and Interior Minister Anas Al-Saleh said in a statement after a cabinet meeting chaired by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

Saleh, also Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs, said citizens would get training in prestigious institutes like Harvard program for development of financial and banking and on cyber-security leadership, risk management and economic studies. He said trainees would select the department they wished to work in, and they would not bear expenses of training abroad. The cabinet, meanwhile, assigned a higher committee to implement recommendations to address what it called "disruption in structure of the population." The government, said Saleh, assigned the Public Authority for Manpower to double for six months support of citizens registered at PAM under Chapter V, and the government would compensate any cuts of salaries of citizens registered under Chapter III for six months, providing they were not fired. The government called for providing logistical support and proper security environment for citizens who were building houses in Al-Mutlaa City, and approved the construction of a medical city in Sabah Al-Ahmad City.

COVID-19 response

Meanwhile, the cabinet underlined the significant role of the State Audit Bureau (SAB) in surveillance over spending on the fight against novel coronavirus (COVID-19). This came following a briefing by SAB Chairman Faisal Al-Shaya during the cabinet meeting. Shaya

expounded on the mechanism of considering spending orders from different state agencies for combatting the virus and fulfilling all relevant needs, said a cabinet statement. The cabinet voiced satisfaction with the briefing of the SAB's chief and stressed the agency's constructive supervisory role and positive cooperation with other state bodies, leading to smooth disbursements and financing.

Earlier on Monday, SAB said it is committed to practicing "effective scrutiny" over public funds and government contracts related to coronavirus measures to prevent any waste of these funds. Several state bodies have received similar purchase orders, particularly for sterile materials, amid the exceptional circumstances that the country is going through and the preventive measures assumed by these bodies, Acting Director of Advance Oversight for economic Affairs Khawla Al-Hathran said.

\$1.248 million saved in revised deal

Ministry order

A Ministry of Defense order for 200,000 (500ml) sanitizer packages, from a company, was worth KD 2.950 per package (\$9) while a similar order for the Ministry of Health, for one million (500ml) sanitizer packages from a local factory, was valued at KD 0.800 (\$2.5) per package, she said. The bureau has informed the defence ministry of the need to coordinate with the Ministry of Health on this matter due to the low price of the offer presented to the health ministry.

The MoD has reevaluated its order documentation, sending it once again to the SAB, including a contract with the local company, offering the price of KD 1.000 (\$3.3). The disparity with the Ministry of Health contract, according to the company, is due to the difference in the quantities purchased and the high price of raw materials in international markets. This has saved the country public funds worth KD 390,000 (\$1.248 million), Hathran explained. — KUNA

In My View

After corona 2

By Abdellatif Sharaa

local@kuwaittimes.com



As I said yesterday, the GCC Health Council issued a booklet on how to go on with our lives after the coronavirus crisis is over. The booklet was all about common sense, but it is important to keep reminding what to do in order to be as safe as possible. The booklet contains instructions for public transport users, starting with the driver who must be in good health and not feeling any symptoms. He should be wearing a facemask when on duty. The vehicle should not have many passengers on board. Passengers should be kept about six feet apart. Frequently touched surfaces should be sterilized more often.

Meanwhile in taxis, the passenger should be in the back seat, besides having the driver wearing a mask. They should be carrying their belongings at all times, and always keep the windows open for fresh air. One you reach your destination, wash your hands before touching your face. For those in their private cars, keep a bottle of sanitizer with you. Sterilize your hands before getting into the car, besides following instructions as above.

When you are in the market, avoid crowded places, avoid using lifts, keep a two-meter distance between you and others and do not touch surfaces needlessly. When you go to a public park, follow the general instructions, in addition to avoiding use of games and rides there.

Now many will return to gatherings such as in diwanis etc, and if this cannot be avoided, at least reduce the frequency of the gatherings, minimize the number of those in attendance and clean surfaces that are touched more often.

A popular destination in Kuwait is restaurants - restaurant owners should spread awareness about washing hands and keeping them clean, and this should become a habit by the employees all the time. Bottles of sanitizers should be kept around the main areas. Employees should not be too close to each other, and they should be told not to shake hands, while wearing masks and gloves and changing them frequently.

Other go-to places are gyms - a safe environment must be provided to protect employees and members and keep equipment, computers and phones clean. Meanwhile, trainers should wash their uniforms after every use. They should watch out for any cuts and should treat them and keep them covered.

It is advised that club members must maintain preventive procedures such as washing hands frequently and not sharing creams and other material placed in open containers. They should keep a cloth between themselves and surfaces of equipment in use, then naturally take a shower as soon as the exercise is over.

See you tomorrow!
"Be grateful for every second of every day that you get to spend with the people you love. Life is so very precious." — Mandy Hale

Coronavirus in Kuwait: What we know so far

KUWAIT: Kuwait has recorded 15,691 cases infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) as of Monday, in addition to 118 deaths. With the exception of 161 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, 4,681 people have recovered completely after previously being infected with the virus, while there are 10,892 people receiving treatment and 2,619 quarantined.

Curfew

Kuwait imposed a total curfew from May 10 to May 30, allowing room for people to walk out for daily exercise between 4:30 pm to 6:30 pm, and to shop at co-ops and supermarkets once every six days during the curfew hours by making an appointment through www.moci.shop. Earlier, Kuwait enforced a country-wide partial curfew from 5:00 pm to 6:00 am, which was later extended to start from 4:00 pm until 8:00 am during Ramadan, while allowing restaurants and food stores to make home deliveries from 5:00 pm until 1:00 am. The government also locked down Mahboula and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh in a bid to contain the spread of the virus and enable health workers to test inhabitants. Earlier, the government decided to close all shopping malls, beauty salons and barber shops as part of its measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. The government also allowed supermarkets, restaurants and shops to host a maximum of five people at a time and in case there are lines, the distance must be at least one meter between people. The Ministry of Commerce launched a website (www.moci.shop) to enable people to book appointments to shop at co-operative societies in their areas. The Public Authority for Industry also announced that companies can apply to evacuate their workers from Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and Mahboula. To do so, they must fill a 'workers evacuation form' available on www.pai.gov.kw, and send the form via email to: Jasiri@moh.gov.kw.

Precautions

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

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

Hotlines

The Ministry of Health has set the following hotlines

to receive inquiries about the coronavirus 24/7: 24970967 - 96049698 - 99048619.

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

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

Medicine delivery

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

- Amiri Hospital: 50880699
- Mubarak Al-Kabeer Hospital: 50880755
- Farwaniya Hospital: 50880852
- Adan Hospital: 50880908
- Jahra Hospital: 50881066
- Sabah Hospital: 97632660
- Jaber Hospital: 96992079
- Ibn Sina Hospital: 99613948
- Chest Hospital: 99258749
- Razi Hospital: 97633487
- Kuwait Cancer Control Center: 96735242
- Psychiatric Hospital: 97350113
- Physiotherapy Hospital: 99824037
- Maternity Hospital: 98559531
- As'ad Al-Hamad Dermatology Center: 98514508

Zain Hospital: 97552031

NBK Hospital: 96931761

Al-Rashed Allergy Hospital: 94162470

Infectious Diseases Hospital: 96989164

Palliative Care Hospital: 94024786

Sabah Al-Ahmad Urology Center: 90952469

KFH Addiction Treatment Center: 94169363

Meanwhile, all licensed pharmacies in Kuwait delivering medicine are allowed to continue their services 24 hours a day. The Ministry of Health is also asking doctors and nurses affiliated with the private medical sector to volunteer in order to contribute to the fight against the virus. Volunteering is available through the link: <http://volunteering.q8-ehalth.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-Khalidi (head of this team): daily 9:00 am - 12:00 pm. Call 9903-6470.

Dr Ahmad Al-Khalidi: daily 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm. Call 9910-7965.

Dr Muneera Al-Qattan: Monday and Wednesday 9:00 am - 1:00 pm. Call 9953-3108.

Dr Zainab Al-Saffar: Sunday and Thursday 7:00 pm - 9:00 pm. Call 9954-9908.

Dr Sameera Al-Kandari: Tuesday 9:00 pm - 12:00 am. Call 6770-9434.

Dr Kawthar Al-Yaqout: Monday and Wednesday 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm. Call 5521-0088.

For information and other concerns, call 9401-4283.

Local

Kuwait Health Ministry announces fresh medical mask supply criteria

Kuwait partakes in Int'l health assembly

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Ministry of Health on Monday set out new ineluctable technical conditions and criteria for medical mask supplies. The conditions embrace a certificate showing that masks are compatible with relevant standards, along with samples of various sizes, the ministry's undersecretary for drug and food control Dr Abdullah Al-Bader said. Should China be the country of origin, then the name of the Chinese supplier has to be mentioned in both Chinese and English and the number of a registered certificate be attached, he stressed. The fresh criteria mainly aim at thwarting the entry into the country of any medical product incompatible with relevant global standards with a view to protecting medical teams in the country, Bader noted.

Separately, Kuwait, represented by Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Humoud Al-Sabah has taken part in the 73rd World Health Assembly convening virtually on May 18-19. The Ministry of Health said in a statement on Monday the meeting's agenda dealt with fighting the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), health care for elderly and polio. The agenda also addressed state's implementation of international health regulations, the budget and follow up on implementation of previous resolutions. Kuwait addressed the long-distance gathering about its implementation of plans and programs adopted by the World Health Organization and its measures against the contagion, the ministry said. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah participates in the 73rd World Health Assembly via video conference. — KUNA

Police arrest two girls for breaching curfew

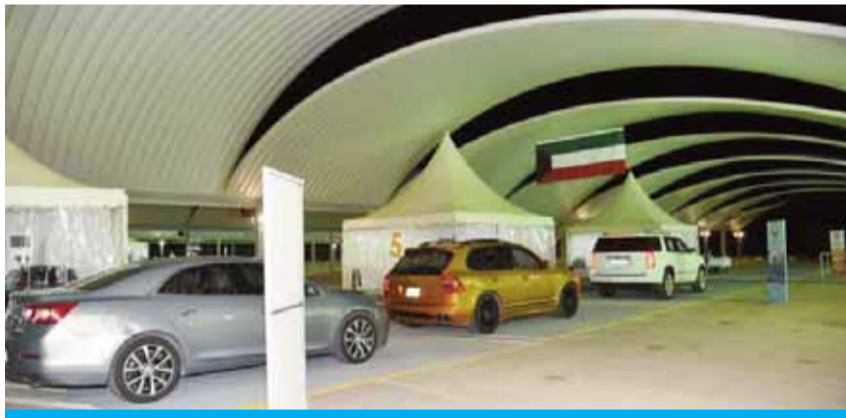
KUWAIT: Kuwait security forces arrested two girls for breaking the curfew and referred them to the proper authorities to face legal charges, the Ministry of Interior said Monday. A video was posted on social media showing the two girls bragging for violating the curfew and that they were above the law, a ministry statement said. Security forces investigated the video and arrested the girls - an Arab and a Kuwaiti citizen - who were referred to questioning ahead of being charged, it added. The security authorities will take all legal actions against any person violating the curfew, said the ministry.

Meanwhile, the ministry urged people with curfew permits obtained to go see a doctor to register precise information of their destinations in order to allow them further permits and thus avoid legal consequences. A ministry statement said persons wishing to see doctor in hospitals or clinics could obtain a curfew permit through: <https://curfew.paci.gov.kw>. The person should show the permit for employee at the hospital or clinic who would verify information in the permit, it said, a step that would enable this person to obtain another permit in future if needed. If the location mentioned in the permit does not match the actual destination, it said, the person would be banned from future permits and be questioned. Kuwait Government imposed the curfew on May 10-30 with the aim of curbing spread of the novel coron-



Time extended for supplying co-ops with foodstuffs

KUWAIT: Undersecretary of Kuwait's Ministry of Social Affairs Abdulaziz Shuaib said Monday that cooperative stores are allowed to receive farm produce and other foodstuffs from 2:00 am to 2:00 pm. "The decision of the ministry to extend this time is meant to ensure that the cooperative stores are well supplied, thus providing the citizens and residents with sufficient fruits, vegetables and other foodstuffs," he said in a press release. "The total lockdown, meant to combat coronavirus pandemic, forced consumers to shop only once in six days," he said, noting that the measure will ensure the availability of basic supplies for everybody. Shuaib added that the ministry spares no effort in coping with the current emergency, praising the cooperation of the union of cooperative stores with the ministry in serving the consumers. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Citizens visited Monday the drive-through novel coronavirus (COVID-19) testing center at Jazeera Airways Park and Fly facility at the Kuwait International Airport. Ministry of Health personnel conduct tests daily to 180 people selected randomly from across Kuwait, and contacted by SMS to report for testing. — Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh

News in brief

342 coronavirus recoveries

KUWAIT: Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah announced yesterday the recovery of 342 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) patients, bringing the total number of recoveries up to 4,681. The minister pointed out that analyses and medical examinations and tests proved that these cases were cured of the coronavirus. They will be transferred to the hospital recuperation ward, pending discharge within the next few days, he noted.

Nine flights

KUWAIT: The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) announced that nine flights departed Kuwait International Airport yesterday, carrying 1,952 people. They included two flights to Lebanon, two flights to Sri Lanka, one flight to India, one flight to Bahrain, one flight to Qatar, and two flights to Pakistan.

Oil price up

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti oil went up 82 cents to \$26.58 pb on Monday compared with \$25.76 pb on Friday, said Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) yesterday. Meanwhile, the West Texas Intermediate June delivery closed \$2.39 up at \$31.82 pb, the same case with the Brent crude July delivery, which went up \$2.31 to \$34.81 pb.

CBK issues bonds

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK), Monday, allocated the most recent issues of CBK bonds and related tawarruq with a total value of KD 240 million (about \$792 million). In a statement to KUNA, the CBK said that the issuance period was six months at a rate of 1.375 percent return. On May 11, the CBK issued bonds and tawarruq with a value of KD 160 million (about \$528 million).

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed

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Local



KUWAIT: Kuwaitis returning recently from abroad on repatriation flights turned in their electronic bracelets on Monday after completing their designated home quarantine period. The bracelets were fitted to each passenger's arm to track their movement and detected any possible breach to mandatory self-quarantine. —Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh



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Kuwaiti FM receives call from UNRWA Commissioner-General

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah received, Monday, a video call from the new Commissioner-General of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) Philippe Lazzarini. Sheikh Ahmad affirmed Kuwait's support for the agency's work and its lofty goals once again in light of what the world is going through as a result of the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. Meanwhile, Lazzarini hailed Kuwait's vital role in supporting the agency, expressing his deep appreciation, gratitude for the pioneering and distinguished humanitarian role played by Kuwait in supporting the afflicted and affected peoples, and assuming a prominent position on the level of humanitarian work regionally and internationally led by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. Lazzarini also praised the continuous support provided by Kuwait to the agency's activities in general and to the "brothers in Palestine" and their just cause in particular. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah speaks in a video call with the new UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini. —KUNA

Municipality closes 175 shops over lockdown breaches

KUWAIT: Kuwait Municipality has closed 175 shops in the Capital Governorate in April for violating coronavirus precautionary measures. Municipality inspection teams issued 352 violations and had stumbled across 140,075 commercial establishments, including cafes, hair salons, restau-

rants, convenience stores, supermarkets and livestock and fish markets. The efforts are being carried out in compliance with the Cabinet and the Ministry of Health decisions, read a statement. The municipality's general cleaning and road works department sanitised and sterilized 52,560 containers. It has also placed notices on 2,004 neglected vehicles and impounded another 95, in addition to the issuance of 80 violations on public cleanliness and waste transportation regulations. Street vendors were handed 37 violations and 91 warnings, while shops were handed 92 violations. Meanwhile, 13 notices for violations were issued to various real estate properties. — KUNA

Local

Kuwait Heritage



KUWAIT: A picture from the fish market in the winter of 1960. (Source: Collection of Ali Al Rais, Center of Research and Studies on Kuwait, 2017. Researched by Mohammed Zakaria Abu El-Ella, Researcher in Heritage, the Ministry of Information)

Sheikh Ali Sabah Al-Salem's 23rd death anniversary

By Mohammed Al-Sawwagh

This month marks the 23rd death anniversary of the late Sheikh Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah (1948 - April 13, 1997); the former minister of interior and the second son of the 12th Amir of Kuwait, the late Sheikh Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah. He died in London of a sudden heart attack in 1997.

It has been 23 years, and you are still remembered by the people and officials of Kuwait. Your name is still being mentioned in all gatherings and in all occasions. You are still remembered as a Sheikh, a leader, a symbol, a brother and a beloved one, Oh, Abu Thamer.

You are still in all hearts and minds. Remembering you after 23 three years is but part of the loyalty you have taught us.

You are always on our minds thanks to your history of achievements ever since you were Ahmadi governor and how you managed to win the hearts

of everyone, how you were keen on sharing people's joys and sorrows and solving their problems.

Sheikh Ali is gone but his legacy is not and continues in his son, Thamer, who is much more like his father. It is the anniversary of the first national security chief and one of the resistance heroes who held a post in Khafji, Saudi Arabia during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990-1991, from where he commanded and ran resistance operations in Kuwait.

One can go on speaking about Sheikh Ali's achievements forever, such as how he managed to restore and rebuild Kuwait Army as minister of defense after the liberation of Kuwait. Along with senior army commanders, he managed to make up for the weaponry and equipment looted by the aggressors. They also managed to boost morale. Five of the most important post-liberation security agreements were signed during his tenure.



Sheikh Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah

Saudi writer talks to LAPA about life in quarantine

KUWAIT: Al-Sada (The Echo) program broadcast by LOYAC's Academy for Performace Arts (LAPA) on Instagram and presented by LOYAC chairperson, Farea Al-Saqqaf, recently hosted the Saudi writer and media figure Badriya Al-Bisher.

Speaking about the current curfew, Al-Bisher said that it was a gift and blessing for her as a writer. "The corona crisis invokes two types of reactions: from people who will have learned their lesson and realized that the environment is healing up as if COVID-19 was a universal message in this regard. In addition, family members are back to face to face contacts for the first time in a long while. On the other hand, some people will never learn the lesson," she explained, pointing that the crisis made her more introvert and realize that humans have so many undiscovered treasures within. "We have been always seeking happiness outside while everything is deep within our souls," she underlined.

Speaking about her marital life with her husband; Saudi comedian Nasser Al-Qasabi, Al-Bisher said that their journey together started at a young age and that they always have an open dialogue. "He always reads my writings and I always follow up his works," she said, noting Al-Qasabi always portrays both opinions in any argument such as the issue of having women wear Abaya presented in his recent series 'Exit 7' which showed a father and his young daughter's different points of view in this regard and whether the society would cope with various changes.

"Creativity is writers' greatest incentive. They



Badriya Al-Bisher

write to shake us and shift us from mind to heart despite the modern trend that worships mind," she said, noting that novels enrich readers' awareness with spiritual and materialistic experiences.

Commenting on the controversy caused by her novel 'THURSDAY VISITORS', Al-Bisher said that the main stream in it was the main figure's rebellion against her mother and what she believes wrong, until she makes the same mistakes her mother did and finally understands her and chooses a different path. "What disturbed me most in those who criticized the novel is that they failed to notice the issue of marriage of little girls... However, the community of readers is so wide and includes people who approve and others who disapprove," she explained, noting that art can fight extremism and paves the way for political decision-making.

Speaking about her experience as a mother, Al-Bisher stressed that it made her grow more mature, loving, merciful and adaptable. "Our kids are more open to humanity and made use of modern technology in communicating. I envy them for the swiftness of their lives and rejection to barriers, racism and rejection," Al-Bisher concluded.

Gloating over one's predicament prohibited in Islam

By Hassan Twaha Bwambale

Among Islam's articles of belief is pre-ordainment. Allah (the Almighty and Majestic) already predetermined what will happen and what will not happen. If someone is tested by a calamity or atrocity, there is wisdom behind it. It is prohibited for a believer to rejoice in a misfortune that seemingly strikes anyone whom he regards as an enemy simply because he doesn't have any guarantee that a similar or worse catastrophe will not strike him. Moreover, he is unaware of Allah's plans. Whatever you consider a calamity, may turn out to be a blessing in disguise.

Allah (the Almighty and Majestic) told Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) thus, what can be translated as: "If a blessing befalls you, it grieves them (i.e. your enemies), but if a calamity strikes you, they say, 'We took our precautions beforehand, and they turn away rejoicing. Tell them that nothing will befall us except what Allah has decreed for us. For He is our guardian and protector and on Him let the believers rely.'" (At-Tawbah 9: 50 - 51)

• Among the things Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) sought refuge with Allah (the Almighty) from was his enemies' rejoicing in his predicament. Abu Huraira (RA) narrated thus: "The Messenger of Allah (pbuh) used to seek refuge with Allah from the difficult moment of a severe calamity, from being overwhelmed by destruction, from being destined to an evil end, and from the malicious joy of the enemies; rejoicing in his predicament." (Al-Bukhari # 6, 616)

• You might rejoice in a person's calamity and then Allah (the Almighty) responds by having mercy on him. Wa'ithila bin Al-Asqa'a narrated that Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said, "Do not get overjoyed at your brother's predicament on whom Allah might bestow mercy and then test you with a calamity." Al-Mun'dhrey graded it as Hasan (authentic) in Saheeh At-Targheeb 3/310)

• Only Allah (SWT) can judge His servants: If anyone - especially the one you don't like - gets afflicted with a calamity, do not conclude that it's because of his sins. Who gave you the moral authority of judging others? Let Allah - the Creator of everything and everyone - judge His creation. Jundub bin Abdillah narrated that Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) informed his companions about a man who quarreled with a friend, turned adversary, saying, 'I swear by Allah that He will not forgive so - and - so!' Allah (the Almighty and Majestic) responded thus:

"Who is He that thinks he can control Me claiming that I won't forgive so - and - so? For, I have, indeed, forgiven him and rendered your deeds null and void." (Saheeh Muslim # 2, 621)

• If anyone is sick or ill, do not conclude that he suffered from that disease or illness because of his sins or misdeeds. Your responsibility towards a sick or ill person is to visit him and pray to Allah (SWT) to cure him. If there is anything that you can do within your capability, do it to help him, even if he is your enemy. Ali bin Abi Talib (RA) narrated that the Messenger of Allah (pbuh) said, what can be translated as: "When a Muslim visits a Muslim patient, he will be walking in Paradise reaping its fruits until he sits down. And when he sits down, he will be covered with mercy. If it is morning, seventy thousand angels will pray to Allah (SWT) to give him mercy and blessings, and if it is evening, seventy thousand angels will beseech Allah (SWT) to send him mercy and blessings." (Al-Albani rated it as Saheeh in Saheeh Al-Ja'mei # 682)

• Even if someone rejoices in your calamity, do not revenge when he is in a similar situation like your previous one or even worse. "Two wrongs cannot make a right." Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) advised thus Ja'ber bin Saleem in a long prophetic narration: "... and if a person insults and humiliates you, do not retaliate in the same manner, because he will bear the evil consequences of that." (Al-Albani rated it as Saheeh (authentic) in Saheeh At-Tirmidhi # 2, 722). Therefore, if anyone rejoices in your misfortune or gloats over your grief or predicament, leave it up to Allah (the Majestic and Sublime) and do not revenge by doing the same.

• However, it is allowed to gloat over the grief or predicament of those who hate you - not for any other reason, but just because you are believers. As such, they unjustifiably wage war against you. Allah (the Almighty and Majestic) tells us in the Noble Qur'an what can be translated as: "Fight them (your enemies in self-defense); Allah will punish them at your hands. He will disgrace them and give you victory over them. Moreover, He will heal what is within the hearts of the believers 'thereby,' and take away the 'deep' rage from their hearts. For it is Allah 'alone' who accepts the repentance of whomever He wills. For 'it is' Allah 'alone' who is all-knowing, all-wise." (At-Tawbah 9: 14 - 15)

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

International

WEDNESDAY, MAY 20, 2020



Bill Gates - A bogeyman of conspiracy theorists

Virus pushes science and its controversies at the centre stage

Page 8

Page 8



NAIROBI: Fidel Mukatia (right), an electrical engineering student from Kenyatta University, stands with a group of students who made a ventilator at the university's facility (Chandaria Business Innovation Incubation Centre) in Nairobi to mitigate the shortage experienced in the country as they fight against COVID-19 coronavirus. — AFP

Africa's tech scene tackles virus

Scientists, engineers, innovators turn to homegrown solutions

NAIROBI: Watching from afar as much of the world was brought to its knees by the coronavirus, African scientists, engineers and innovators have turned to homegrown solutions to prepare for the worst case scenario. By the time the virus hit Africa, where cases have risen relatively slowly, images of overwhelmed hospitals and stories of health workers strapped for protective gear had been streaming in for weeks.

Mehul Shah from Ultra Red Technologies, a 3D printing company in Nairobi, said he and his partner Neeval Shah quickly realised they could be "first responders" in producing locally-made equipment. In only three days they put together a working design for 3D-printed face shields made up of a visor that clips onto a plastic sheet. They currently produce around 500 a day. "It's very important that we can show Kenyans that we can do this here and we don't need to rely on importation. We have got the innovative know-how and the means to get this done here," he told AFP.

The team is also helping produce components that would allow ventilators to be used on more than one patient, as well as printing parts for locally-made ventilators. While Kenya only has 912 cases and 50 deaths after a little over two months, "we are preparing for the worst case scenario," Mehul said. He said it was "a first" to see manufacturers in Kenya and even worldwide collaborating so much. "All the companies are looking at how they can use their resources to help out. All the competitors who would be fighting against each other are all coming together." In Benin, the start-up Blolab—a digital fabrication laboratory — has also been printing 3D face shields.

Contact-tracing apps

Developers in Kenya's thriving tech scene are among several on the continent working on contact tracing apps. FabLab, an innovation hub in western Kisumu has developed an application called Msafari (Safari means journey in Swahili) which can track passengers on pub-

lic transport. With it, passengers entering a minibus taxi—known as a matatu—can input a simple code on their phone along with the vehicle registration number. "If one of those passengers tested positive we are now able to trace all the contacts who checked in on that particular vehicle," said Tairus Ooyi, the lead app developer and data scientist at FabLab.

Low-cost ventilators

Another busy area of innovation has been the production of ventilators, which have been in short supply even in rich countries as COVID-19 patients needing oxygen have swamped hospitals. Most African countries have only a handful of the machines and 10 have none at all, according to the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention. In Kenya, engineering students in collaboration with the medical department at the Kenyatta University, produced a low-cost ventilator at a tenth of the price of an imported machine—estimated at \$10,000.

Doctor Gordon Ogwenko, a medical professor at the university said Kenya had about 50 working ventilators for a population of more than 50 million. "We are making machines with locally available material ... pandemics can come and go but other conditions also require critical care," he said. The ventilator is undergoing clinical trials. In Ghana, the Academic City College in Accra and Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Kumasi managed to produce a ventilator costing between \$500 and \$1,000 which takes only an hour to assemble. A group of Rwandan biomedical scientists at the Integrated Polytechnic Regional College in Kigali have also been testing a locally made prototype ventilator.

Meanwhile in Somalia, which has limited capacity to respond to its growing caseload, 21-year-old Mohamed Adawe has invented an automated resuscitator. While doctors normally need to pump oxygen via an Ambu bag valve mask by hand on patients struggling to breathe, Adawe's contraption—made up of a



NAIROBI: Mehul Shah, the director of Ultra Red Technologies, works on a 3D printed face shield, to be used for protection of the entire face area from splashes, sprays and spatter of bodily fluids as a preventive measure against the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus, during an interview at his office in Nairobi.—AFP

wooden box, pipes and an electric system—pushes oxygen from an air tank into a mask placed over the patient's mouth. "I saw people having difficulties in breathing and many have died because they could not get a machine to help them provide vital oxygen," said Adawe, who is studying public health.

Drones and robots

Aside from locally-made items — African countries are also employing other technology to tackle the virus. Rwanda last week began using four humanoid robots in

coronavirus treatment centers to minimize human to human contact. They can screen temperatures and monitor the status of patients. In Ghana, the US-based company Zipline which uses drones to ferry medicines, blood and vaccines to avoid poor roads, has begun to transport coronavirus tests. "The government told us that their biggest challenge is that the virus has spread out of the cities, they have suspected cases popping up in the rural areas and the logistics from the rural areas to the cities are very difficult," said Zipline CEO in Ghana, Daniel Marfo.—AFP

Saudi attacker on US base 'had ties with Al-Qaeda'

WASHINGTON: The Saudi military student who killed three Americans at a US naval base in December had longstanding ties to Al-Qaeda and planned an attack before he arrived in the United States, US justice officials said Monday. The December 6 attack by Mohammed Alshamrani, a Royal Saudi Air Force flight student at the Naval Air Station Pensacola in Florida, "was actually the culmination of years of planning and preparation," said FBI Director Christopher Wray.

Evidence discovered on an encrypted cell phone shows he was radicalized at least as far back as 2015, and had since been associating with "dangerous" operatives from the Yemen-based Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), Wray added. The FBI and Justice Department revealed their findings after a months-long effort to crack the en-

crption on Alshamrani's iPhone, which they said Apple refused to help with. US Attorney General Bill Barr accused Apple of putting its own financial interests ahead of the nation's. "If not for our FBI's ingenuity, some luck, and hours upon hours of time and resources, this information would have remained undiscovered," Barr said.

"The bottom line: our national security cannot remain in the hands of big corporations who put dollars over lawful access and public safety. The time has come for a legislative solution," he said. Apple rejected suggestions that it did not cooperate in the investigation. But the company also said that creating a so-called "back door" into its phones for US law enforcement would make them vulnerable for a wide range of hackers. "There is no such thing as a back door just for the good guys, and the American people do not have to choose between weakening encryption and effective investigations," Apple said in a statement.

Wray said the 21-year-old Saudi had expressed a desire to learn to fly years ago with plans for a "special operation," enlisting in the Royal Saudi Air Force and joining flight training in the United States. "In the months before

the attack, while he was here among us, he talked with AQAP about his plans and tactics — taking advantage of the information he acquired here, to assess how many people he could try to kill," Wray said. He was in touch with AQAP contacts the night before he launched the attack, Wray added. The December 6 shooting in a classroom building at the naval base left three US sailors dead and wounded eight other people, including two responding sheriff's deputies, before Alshamrani was killed by police. AQAP claimed responsibility, but at the time there was no evidence of a direct link.

The incident forced the temporary freeze of all US training for foreign military officials in order to review security precautions. The decades-old US-Saudi training program has been crucial to the countries' close relationship, with thousands of Saudis undergoing military training in the United States. The US expelled 21 of Alshamrani's classmates for reasons including that some had allegedly been aware of his radical leanings and others possessed jihadist material and child pornography. The program has since resumed, but with heavier vetting of Saudi students and a ban on their accessing firearms.—AFP

Virus deadliest in black and Latino neighborhoods

NEW YORK: Some New York City neighborhoods have seen death rates from the novel coronavirus nearly 15 times higher than others, according to data released by New York City's health department on Monday, showing the disproportionate toll taken on poor communities. The data shows for the first time a breakdown on the number of deaths in each of the city's more than 60 ZIP codes. The highest death rate was seen on the edge of Brooklyn in a neighborhood dominated by a large subsidized-housing development called Starrett City. Civic leaders had been pushing for the more granular data, which they said would show stark racial and economic disparities after New York City became the heart of one of the worst coronavirus outbreaks in the world in March and April.

In the wealthy, mostly white enclave of Gramercy Park in Manhattan, the rate is 31 deaths per 100,000 residents, the data shows. A long subway ride away in Far Rockaway in the borough of Queens, which is more than 40% black and 25% Latino or Hispanic, the death rate is nearly 15 times higher: 444 deaths per 100,000 residents. "It's really heartbreaking and it should tug at the moral conscience of the city," Mark Levine, chairman of the City Council's health committee, said in an interview. "We knew we had dramatic inequality. This, in graphic form, shows it's even greater than maybe many of us feared."

Poor black and Latino New Yorkers are much more likely to do low-paid, essential jobs that cannot be done remotely, putting them at higher risk of exposure, Levine said.—Reuters

International

Young Tunisians eat in secret despite Ramadan, lockdown

A Facebook group attracts 12,000 members

NICOSIA: Hiding snacks under their beds or behind piles of clothes, young Tunisians are finding ways to subvert the Ramadan fast - despite being locked down with their Muslim conservative parents. The generation gap in religious observance is not new but it took on a new dimension this year as the fasting month coincides with strict movement restrictions to halt the spread of the novel coronavirus. A Facebook group for Tunisians seeking to circumvent social pressures and eat during the day has attracted some 12,000 members. "How can you hide your food during the day and eat without being spotted by your parents?" one asked.

Among the more imaginative suggestions: eat whilst showering, or if you are a young woman, pretend to be on your period: Islam allows menstruating women to forego the dawn-to-dusk fast. Tunis resident Zahra, a 23-year-old student and member of the "Fater" ("fast-breaker") group, said she had used that excuse or hid in order to eat but her mother was not fooled. "I told my mother I'm not a Muslim anymore, but she still acts like she doesn't know," said Zahra, adding that she had given up fasting two years ago. "A lot of people are afraid of being kicked out of home. I'm not, but if I tell my parents I'm not fasting, they'll imagine (I'm doing) worse things."

The North African country's post-revolution constitution guarantees freedom of conscience, but there are no clear laws against eating in public during the holy month. But every Ramadan, the police arrest people caught eating or smoking during the daylight hours, citing vague "public decen-

cy" legislation or a decades-old directive. Many young Tunisians face family pressure to fast - something harder to avoid this year as the lockdown to battle the spread of coronavirus means they have to stay home. Yasmine, a 19-year-old student who gave up fasting four years ago, said she drank water secretly during the day. "I'm afraid I'll be despised if I tell my family," she said.

Generation gap

Imen, 26, said there is a "generation gap" when it comes to fasting. She normally lives alone in Tunis, but is spending Ramadan with her parents in the coastal town of Nabeul. She said she wanted to "admit" that she had given up fasting "but everyone's super stressed with the lockdown". "It would hurt my mother... My father knows, but we don't talk about it," she said. She added that while Tunisians are largely tolerant, "Ramadan is a special time when people feel they have a right to judge you." "Young people think differently and the media doesn't reflect that," she added.

In normal years, some cafes in Tunis often stay open during Ramadan, with newspaper obscuring the windows to give customers privacy. For some people, the pressure has eased in recent years. "My father realised I was eating, but he's open-minded and laughed," said Azer, 36. He added that he regularly eats in front of his colleagues and that in recent years he has felt "less judged". The Facebook group's founder, Abdelkarim Benadballah, agreed. Eating during the daytime in Ramadan is "less of a social taboo than before" but many non-fasters "can't eat at home out of respect for their families".



A generation gap in religious observance



TUNIS: In this file photo, a Tunisian man drinks water during a demonstration in Tunis to denounce the arrests of non-fasting people during the Muslim fasting month. —AFP

'Hypocrisy'

"I find it a bit hard being a hypocrite," said Walid, a 40-year-old living in confinement with his parents. "I hate hypocrisy in society; people who have sex (outside marriage), steal and drink alcohol then suddenly become really religious for 30 days." While it is impossible to measure how many people break the fasting norms, all those contacted by AFP said they knew many people who weren't fasting.

Tunisia has had vigorous public debates on individual freedoms since its 2011 revolution, along with demon-

strations for the right to eat in public. Yet nine years on, police are still able to "arrest non-fasters for attacking public morals", said Anoir Zayani of the Association for the Defense of Individual Freedoms (ADLI). ADLI and the Tunisian League for Human Rights (LTDH) have warned of a rise in populist conservative rhetoric "demonizing" campaigns for such freedoms - particularly during Ramadan. "We are accused of wanting to disrupt the Tunisian way of life," Zayani said. For him, "exercising freedom would not affect the Tunisian way of life, but will create enriching diversity". —AFP

WHO wins praise from many nations, criticism from US

GENEVA: The World Health Organization received praise from many countries but fierce criticism from the United States at its virtual assembly, as members sought to agree a joint response to COVID-19 - and assurances that any vaccine would be available to all. "COVID-19 must be a wake-up call. It is time for an end to the hubris," United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told the virtual assembly.

"Either we get through this pandemic together, or we fail." The annual World Health Assembly (WHA) has this year been trimmed from the usual three weeks to just two days, and is focusing solely on the pandemic, which has killed over 315,000 people globally. Speaking by video-link, a wide range of country leaders and health ministers hailed the WHO's efforts to coordinate the response, and urged more funding and stronger support for the UN agency. But US health secretary Alex Azar blamed the WHO for not obtaining or providing the information needed to stem the pandemic.

WHO 'failure'

"We must be frank about one of the primary reasons this outbreak spun out of control: there was a failure by this organization to obtain the information

that the world needed, and that failure cost many lives," he said. WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus meanwhile reiterated to the assembly that his organisation had "sounded the alarm early, and we sounded it often". And Guterres noted: "Many countries have ignored the recommendations of the World Health Organization." The world was "paying a heavy price" for the sometimes contradictory strategies, he added.

Washington is locked in an increasingly bitter spat with Beijing, where the pandemic began late last year. But it has also increasingly taken aim at the WHO. US President Donald Trump announced last month that Washington, the WHO's largest donor, would suspend its funding to the organization. Despite the growing tensions between the world's two largest economies, member states hope the WHO would adopt a resolution aimed at fashioning a joint response, including commitments on equitable access to potential treatments and vaccines.

'Global public good'

Chinese President Xi Jinping voiced support for a joint approach, vowing in his address to make any vaccine his country developed available for all. "After the research and development of China's coronavirus vaccine is completed and it is put into use, it will be made a global public good," said Xi, whose country currently has five potential vaccines in clinical trials. French President Emmanuel Macron said any vaccine must "be a global public good". German Chancellor Angela Merkel also insisted it "should of course be



GENEVA: Photo shows a general view of the World Health Organization assembly room with WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus delivering a speech at the WHO headquarters in Geneva. —AFP

available and affordable to all".

A WHA resolution tabled by the European Union also calls for an "impartial, independent and comprehensive evaluation" of the international response to the coronavirus crisis. An EU source hailed the draft as "ambitious", pointing out that if it passed by consensus as expected, it would mark the first time a global forum had achieved unanimous support for a text on the COVID-19 response. Countries had not shied away from thorny topics, said the source - including a call for more WHO reform after determining that its capacities had "proven insufficient to prevent a crisis of this magnitude". —AFP

Libya forces capture key air base

CAIRO: Forces aligned with Libya's internationally recognized government took control of an air base south-west of Tripoli on Monday after a sustained assault, in what could be their most significant advance for nearly a year. Watiya air base, 125 km from the capital, has been an important strategic foothold for forces loyal to eastern-based commander Khalifa Haftar, who launched an offensive to capture Tripoli in April 2019. The campaign sharply escalated a long-running conflict between factions based in eastern and western Libya and caused a surge in military intervention by foreign powers.

Forces aligned with the Government of National Accord (GNA) had taken full control of Watiya, Osama Juweli, a top military commander, was quoted as saying by official media early on Monday. Footage posted by GNA forces on social media showed them driving down runways at the base unhindered. The

forces also posted a picture of what they said was a captured Russian-made Pantsir air defence system mounted on a truck at the base, as well as an operating manual in Arabic. A separate video post showed the purported destruction from the air of another Pantsir held by Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA) as it was being transported by road in the early hours of Monday. GNA forces said it was the third they had hit in two days. The video could not be independently verified and the LNA has in recent days denied at least one other GNA claim it had destroyed a Pantsir. In a statement, the LNA said its forces had withdrawn from the base as a tactical manoeuvre, that Watiya currently held no military importance, and that any equipment recovered there was old and disused. LNA sources said earlier their forces had withdrawn after the base had come under intensive bombardment.

Morale boost

GNA forces have pushed back against their rivals in recent weeks with increased support from Turkey, capturing towns on the coast west of Tripoli last month. Haftar's LNA and its allies still control eastern and southern Libya, including most of the country's oil facilities, which they have been blockading since January. They also hold Sirte, a city at the centrepiece



TRIPOLI: Fighters loyal to Libya's UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) climb over a partially disassembled MiG 23 aircraft, after seizing Al-Watiya airbase also known as Okba Ibn Nafa airbase, southwest of the capital Tripoli. —AFP

of Libya's Mediterranean coastline, which they took at the start of the year. The capture of Watiya will further boost morale among GNA forces that were on the back foot late last year, and GNA Prime Minister Fayez Serraj signalled they would try to build on the advance. —Reuters

Gravediggers battle COVID-19 fears and stigma in Indonesia

JAKARTA: Gravedigger Junaidi Hakim shouts "hurry up" as he summons his weary colleagues in a never-ending race to bury novel coronavirus victims at a Jakarta cemetery. The team switches quickly from digging fresh graves to burying the bodies - aiming to get the task done in under 10 minutes to lessen the chance of getting infected themselves.

"The most worrying part is when we're unloading a coffin because we have to touch it," said 42-year-old Hakim, a father of four. "We feel a bit relieved after it's buried." Some 50 gravediggers at Pondok Ranggon cemetery - one of two earmarked for COVID-19 victims in the Indonesian capital - are working up to 15 hours a day, seven days a week, for monthly wages of 4.2 million rupiah (\$290). They dig at least 20 fresh graves daily, marked with white wooden poles that list the name, birthdate and day the occupant died. But they can hardly keep up with the influx of confirmed and suspected virus victims. "The ambulances never stop bringing us bodies," said Hakim.

The team struggles to keep up in the searing tropical heat, with sobbing relatives never far away. Families are urged not to linger, robbing them of the chance to per-

form prayers for loved ones. "My heart breaks seeing those crying families," said Minar, 54, who like many Indonesians goes by one name. "I've been digging graves for 33 years now and I've never been this tired before. This is probably a test from God," he added.

The challenges are compounded in the fasting month of Ramadan when many in Indonesia, the world's biggest Muslim majority nation, don't eat or drink during daylight hours. Naman Suherman said he is able to overcome gnawing thirst and hunger in the belief he's doing something "noble" for victims whose covered burial pits are sprinkled with pink flowers. "What strengthens my faith on this job is knowing that I can help take the deceased to their final resting place," the 55-year-old gravedigger said. —AFP

News in brief

IS gunmen hit execute 11

BEIRUT: Islamic State group gunmen executed 11 people, all but one of them pro-regime fighters, in two attacks on a desert highway in eastern Syria, a war monitor said Monday. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the bodies of seven members of a pro-regime militia were found at dawn on the highway linking Deir Ezzor to Damascus. On Sunday, a Syrian army officer, two other soldiers and a woman were shot dead, also execution-style, on another stretch of the highway, and their vehicle was seized, Observatory head Rami Abdel Rahman said. There was no immediate claim of responsibility from the Islamic State group on the Telegram messaging service it uses to issue statements. Since its territorial defeat in Syria in March 2019, IS attacks have been restricted to the vast deserts stretching from Deir Ezzor to Homs in the centre of the country. —AFP

Rocket near US embassy

BAGHDAD: One rocket hit near the US embassy in Baghdad yesterday morning, security sources told AFP, the first to land in the high-security zone in weeks. The blast could be heard across the Iraqi capital and triggered security sirens at the US embassy compound but did not cause casualties, the sources confirmed. There was no immediate claim of responsibility. It follows more than two dozen similar attacks against American interests in Iraq since October that the US has blamed on Iran-backed factions among Iraq's security forces. The volleys of rockets, which have killed US, British and Iraqi armed personnel, have severely strained ties between Baghdad and Washington. Tensions reached boiling point in January when the US killed Iranian general Qasem Soleimani and Iraqi commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis in a drone strike on Baghdad. But the US and Iraq have hoped to reset the relationship since Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhemi took the helm earlier this month, with bilateral talks planned for June. —AFP

Earthquake kills 4 in China

BEIJING: Four people were killed and another 24 injured when an earthquake shook southwestern China, local authorities said yesterday. The shallow quake in Qiaojia county struck late Monday evening, the Yunnan government said on its social media account. Video clips on China's Twitter-like platform Weibo showed shoppers taking cover in a store as boxes flew off the shelves, while students in a classroom elsewhere scrambled to hide under their desks before covering their heads with textbooks. The quake hit near the city of Zhaotong, which has a population of over six million, and registered 5.0-magnitude, according to China's government seismology authority. Around 600 rescue workers have been sent to the disaster area, the Yunnan government said, including firefighters and soldiers from the local division of the People's Liberation Army. —AFP

Sweden's deadliest month

STOCKHOLM: Sweden, whose softer approach to the new coronavirus pandemic has garnered worldwide attention, recorded its deadliest month in almost three decades in April, according to statistics released on Monday. Sweden has stopped short of introducing the restrictive lockdowns seen elsewhere in Europe, instead opting for an approach based on the "principle of responsibility". The Scandinavian country has kept schools open for children under the age of 16, along with cafes, bars, restaurants and businesses, and urged people to respect social distancing guidelines. —AFP

International

Bill Gates, the bogeyman of virus conspiracy theorists

Gates accused of wanting 'to eliminate 15% of the population'

PARIS: False claims targeting billionaire philanthropist Bill Gates are gaining traction online since the beginning of the coronavirus outbreak, with experts warning they could hamper efforts to curb the virus. Doctored photos and fabricated news articles crafted by conspiracy theorists - shared thousands of times on social media platforms and messaging apps, in various languages - have gone as far as accusing the Microsoft founder of creating the outbreak.

Gates, who has pledged \$250 million to efforts to fight the pandemic, is the latest in a string of online targets despite the World Health Organization's efforts to fight what it called an "infodemic" - misinformation fanned by panic and confusion about the virus. In recent months, 5G networks and Hungarian-American billionaire George Soros have also been blamed for creating COVID-19, which has killed more than 315,000 people around the world. "Bill Gates has always been a target of specific conspiracy communities," said Rory Smith, research manager at First Draft, a non-profit that provides research and training for journalists.

Gates - whose eponymous foundation has spent billions of dollars improving healthcare in developing countries over the past 20 years - has become "a kind of abstract bogeyman", said Whitney Phillips, an assistant professor at New York's Syracuse University, where she teaches digital ethics. A video accusing Gates of wanting "to eliminate 15 percent of the population" through vaccination and electronic microchips has racked up nearly two million views on YouTube. Similar allegations "exploded" between January and April, Smith said.

Since the start of the crisis, AFP Fact Check has

debunked dozens of anti-Gates rumors circulating on platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram in languages including English, French, Spanish, Polish and Czech. A number of accusations, including posts claiming that the FBI arrested Gates for biological terrorism or that he supports a Western plot to poison Africans, share a common thread.

They accuse the tycoon of exploiting the crisis, whether it is to "control people" or make money from selling vaccines. "These conspiracies are powerful enough to drive down institutional trust around health organisations, and as a result, possibly drive down vaccination rates, which is worrying," Smith said. Gates' vocal criticism of US President Donald Trump and support for vaccine development made him "the perfect scapegoat for a crisis that emerges on the intersection of technology and (medical) science," Kinga Polynczuk-Alenius, a social sciences researcher at Finland's University of Helsinki, wrote in a university blog post.

It is not the first time Gates has found himself at the mercy of conspiracy theorists. When Zika virus broke out in 2015 in Brazil, he was one of several powerful Western figures blamed for the disease. Other rumors claim that he is secretly a lizard, an old favorite among online trolls. "He hasn't become conspiracists' favorite target, he has been (their favorite target) for a long time," Sylvain Delouvee, a social psychology researcher at France's University of Rennes said.

The recent explosion in false claims could be explained as a coping mechanism during the global crisis, Smith said. "People are constantly looking for information to make sense out of this reality, and hav-



BERLIN: A protester wears a face mask reading 'Give Gates (referring to Bill Gates) no Chance' as she attends a protest against restrictions implemented in order to limit the spread of the novel coronavirus near the Chancellery in Berlin. —AFP

ing these conspiracies offers a convenient way of having power over your situation," he said. The pandemic has also provided fertile breeding ground for attacks on the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, particularly by anti-vaccine campaigners whose influential online presence was already brewing years

before the virus emerged. The charity's humanitarian work in Africa, where misinformation about Gates is particularly present, and financial support of the World Health Organization - it is the agency's second-largest donor - have fed rumors of dark secrets and ploys for power. —AFP

Brazilian tribe faces 'genocide'

SAO PAULO: An indigenous group in Brazil that traditionally has no contact with the outside world is suffering a "genocide" because of illegal loggers' encroachment on their land, a rights group said Monday. The Awa Guaja, a hunter-gatherer tribe of around 400 people in the Amazon rainforest, has lost huge tracts of land to deforestation in recent years, making them struggle to find food, said a statement from the indigenous rights group Forest Guardians.

"If you don't put an end to the invasions of our territory, the uncontacted Awa Guaja people will die," the group's coordinator, Olimpio Guajajara, said in a statement. "We are warning the Brazilian government and the international community that the Awa Guaja people are currently suffering a genocide." The Forest Guardians were launched in 2012 in northeastern Brazil to stop illegal loggers and miners from operating on indigenous lands. Several of its members have been murdered in recent months.

The Forest Guardians said deforestation is forcing the Awa Guaja to venture ever closer to other groups' villages, sometimes leading to conflict. On Saturday, a man from the Guajajara indigenous group was shot in the chest with an arrow, possibly by Awa Guaja who had been seen in the area. The man is in stable condition, but the unprecedented incident left the Forest Guardians "very worried," said the statement.



MANAUS: Saterre-Mawe indigenous leader Andre Saterre (right) and other members of the group return to the community of Wakuru, in Taruma neighborhood, a rural area west of Manaus, Amazonas State, Brazil, after collecting medicinal herbs. — AFP

Illegal loggers "use violence when they come across indigenous people and it's possible that this has happened and made the Awa angry and on alert for their survival," it said.

Deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon has surged under far-right President Jair Bolsonaro, who wants to open protected lands to farming and mining. The new coronavirus has meanwhile added to concerns

about indigenous groups in the Amazon, since they have a tragic history of being decimated by diseases arriving from the outside world. The virus has now infected 40 indigenous groups, with 537 positive cases and 102 deaths, according to the Brazilian Indigenous Peoples' Association. Brazil has an estimated 800,000 indigenous people from 300 ethnic groups. — AFP

Elderly immigrant commits suicide in US detention center

LOS ANGELES: A 74-year-old immigrant who had pleaded to be released from a detention facility in California for fear of contracting COVID-19 died by suicide at the weekend, officials said on Monday. Choung Won Ahn, who suffered from diabetes, hypertension and heart ailments, was found dead late Sunday at the Mesa Verde Detention Facility located in Bakersfield, some two hours north of Los Angeles. He had been detained there by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) since February 21.

In March, a group of attorneys had made a plea for Ahn and others with serious health conditions to be released because of the probability they could get infected with the novel coronavirus while in detention. "The risk of contracting COVID-19 in congregate settings is very high," Jordan Wells, staff attorney with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) Foundation of Southern California, wrote in a letter to ICE. "Despite an overwhelming consensus of public health experts... you have failed to release people like a 74-year-old man with chronic respiratory problems."

The ACLU said Ahn's appeal was rejected. "We are processing, and we are very emotionally upset," said Ahn's brother, Young Ahn, in a statement. "We are angry. He did not deserve to be treated this way. He's a human being, but to them, he's just a number. There are other people in the same situation. It shouldn't be happening again." ICE did not immediately reply to an AFP request for details about the case. But in a statement to local media, it said that Ahn was found dead in his cell at 9:52 pm local time on Sunday.

"ICE appreciates consideration while details are confirmed and next of kin and other notifications are made," the agency said. "Additional information will be provided as it is available." In recent weeks, a number of detainees with serious health problems have been released from ICE detention facilities in response to a lawsuit filed by rights groups and the public defender's office in San Francisco. "We are deeply saddened by Mr Ahn's death," said Manohar Raju, the San Francisco public defender. "Mr Ahn was particularly medically vulnerable and should have been released by ICE to his family, particularly given the grave risks of COVID in ICE detention centers." —AFP



SAN SALVADOR: A Salvadoran Health Ministry worker shows a package of bottles of Hydroxychloroquine pills to be distributed in hospitals in San Salvador, amid the COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak. — AFP

Virus pushes science and its controversies at the centre stage

PARIS: Hydroxychloroquine, double-blind studies, convalescent plasma, herd immunity - the coronavirus pandemic has thrust the language of science into public view as never before. Having escaped the confines of the laboratory, these and other once-obscure terms are fast becoming part of household parlance. But familiarity with the terminology does not necessarily lead to a better understanding, especially when there is an avalanche of new findings, experts caution.

When researchers disagree or change their mind on the efficacy of a treatment or policy, the normal back-and-forth of the scientific process can breed confusion, they say. This is only amplified by a 24-hour news cycle and social networks, they add. The number of studies about the new coronavirus and the disease it causes has skyrocketed into the thousands, with hundreds more in the pipeline at any given time. This is as it should be, said Serge Horbach, an expert on academic publishing at Radboud University in The Netherlands and author of a new study about the explosion in research sparked by

the coronavirus pandemic.

In a public health crisis that, to date, has infected nearly five million people and killed more than 315,000, "the rapid dissemination of relevant scientific knowledge is of paramount importance," he wrote. As of mid-April, he had catalogued more than 2,000 so-called pre-prints, published without having gone through a scientific journal's peer review, which normally takes many months. Even the usual channel in which research is subject to scrutiny by peers or fellow experts before publication has been "considerably accelerated", Horbach said.

In the current global health pandemic, articles have been going online or into print within 57 days, half-again as fast as usual, he has found. Publishers have also made relevant studies freely available, and suspended the usual practice of releasing them under embargo which delays access even further. For years, journals have been under pressure from frustrated authors and scientific institutions to speed up a practice that dates to the early 18th century. —FP

Pandemic throws up additional challenges for US firefighters

LOS ANGELES: The wildfire season in the western United States is shaping up to be even more challenging this year because of the coronavirus pandemic, which has forced firefighters to rethink how they respond to disaster while also protecting themselves. "We're focused on COVID-19, we're focused on coronavirus mitigation, trying to do our best to suppress the spread while at the same time we've got to mitigate and suppress these fires as we move into wildfire season," California's Governor Gavin Newsom said last week as he promised increased funding for firefighting.

Newsom said California has had a 60 percent increase so far this year in wildfires compared to the same period last year because of drier weather. "We are mindful of the unavoidable anxiety that this time of year presents to people," said Newsom, referring to the wildfire season in the state and across the West that is starting earlier and ending later each year. "We have been prepping for this upcoming wildfire season—and we are not stepping back our efforts." The November 2018 Camp Fire in northern California was the deadliest and most destructive in the state's history, leaving 86 people dead and all but wiping off the map the small town of Paradise.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has added to the anxiety this year and forced the state to update evacuation plans and study how to set up base camps during wildfires. "The camps are the size of a small village or a small community," Kerry Greene, an emergency management specialist and spokeswoman for the National Interagency Fire Center, told AFP. "They can have up to and over 1,000 firefighters and support personnel in one camp and all the things that you need to support them—cafeteria, showers, sleeping areas, supply areas," she said. "There's a lot of people moving in and out of the camp including trash pick-up crews."

And today, such camps would provide ideal conditions for the spread of the virus. So firefighters across the United States have been studying how best to address the fire season while taking into account the new health concerns. "The sight of a large fire camp will not be the norm any longer," Greene said. "Most fire suppression efforts will be in small groups and dispersed into isolated camps or other means to provide social distancing for firefighters and the public to prevent COVID-19 spread." She said some of the planning envisions having crews stick with the same firefighters all season to protect them and limit the spread of the virus.

"This is the same concept families have used to limit exposure to the COVID-19 virus," she said. "We are encouraging our crews to manage themselves more like families than individuals." Firefighting tactics are also being reevaluated, with crews adopting old-school techniques that call for an aggressive approach to fighting wildfires to ensure firefighters' safety. "We will be putting all the fires out as quickly as we possibly can," said CalFire chief Thom Porter. "That initial attack is the key component to keeping fires small, and keeping firefighters healthy."

State officials are also examining how to handle large evacuations in the event of major fires. "We're looking at evacuation centers being segregated, maybe COVID versus non-COVID," said Mark Ghilarducci, director of the California governor's Office of Emergency Services. "We're looking at possibly using the hotels solution, where we have the opportunity to put evacuees in single rooms, versus congregating in a large, sort of like a dormitory or a school gymnasium which we typically use," he added. —AFP

Business

WEDNESDAY, MAY 20, 2020

10 Uber slashing jobs, trimming investment to survive crisis**11** NBK provides customers with a mobile branch**11** US auto plants get back to work after COVID halts

LONDON: In this file photo, a Job Centre Plus sign is pictured in central London. British unemployment jumped in the first quarter on the back of coronavirus, despite a lockdown being imposed only near the end of the period, official data showed yesterday.—AFP

UK jobless claims jump on virus fallout

Number of people on company payrolls falls by 1.6% in April

LONDON: A measure of the number of people claiming unemployment benefits in Britain leapt to its highest level since 1996 in April, the first full month of the government's coronavirus lockdown, data published yesterday showed. The claimant count rose by 856,500 — the biggest ever month-on-month jump — to 2.097 million, a 69 percent increase, the Office for National Statistics said. The surge would have been even sharper without a government program to pay 80 percent of the wages of workers put on temporary leave by their employers, who do not count towards the unemployment total.

The ONS said emergency changes to Britain's welfare system meant the claimant count number included more people who were still actually in work than normal, but the scale of the rise in claims showed the hit to the labor market. "While only covering the first weeks of restrictions, our figures show COVID-19 is having a major impact on the labor market," ONS Deputy National Statistician Jonathan Athow said.

A Reuters poll of economists had produced a median forecast for a leap of 676,500 in the claimant count, with forecasts ranging widely from just over 56,000 to as high as 1.5 million. Tej Parikh, chief economist at the Institute of Directors, said the government's wage subsidy scheme was holding off some job losses for now but it was not



Vacancies fall by most on record

clear how firms would react when they are required to help fund it from August. "Many companies will still be in the middle of a cashflow crisis, and will struggle with any cost increases. Government faces an onerous task in winding down the scheme without causing too much pain," he said.

Experimental data for jobs in April, based on tax figures, showed the number of people on companies' payrolls fell by 1.6 percent from March and were 1.2 percent lower than a year before. Vacancies fell by the most on record in the February-April period, down 170,000 to 637,000, with hospitality job openings falling the most.

Other data published by the ONS served as a

reminder of how strong Britain's labour market was going into the COVID-19 crisis. Britain's unemployment rate fell to 3.9 percent in the January-March period — covering only one week of the lockdown which began on March 23 — from 4.0 percent in the three months to February.

Employment grew by 211,000 in the first three months of the year compared with a forecast for jobs growth of 50,000 in the Reuters poll. But with much of the economy shut down by the government to slow the spread of coronavirus, Britain could be heading for its sharpest economic slump in more than 300 years, the Bank of England has warned. The country's budget forecasters have warned the unemployment rate could hit 10 percent in the April-June period, even with millions of workers shielded by the government's scheme to pay their wages while they are temporarily laid off.

British finance minister Rishi Sunak said on Monday that 8 million employees were now covered by that scheme and more than 2 million claims had been made under a parallel program for self-employed workers. Productivity fell sharply in the first quarter, with output per hour worked down by 1.1 percent from the final quarter of 2020. Output per worker — which includes those on furlough — was down 2.9 percent compared with a year earlier, the biggest fall since 2009. — Reuters



IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva

The IMF is due to release new global projections in June. The global outlook remains a huge focus for finance ministers from the Group of Seven advanced economies, who will meet remotely on Tuesday, according to the US Treasury.

Georgieva told Reuters the Fund was focused on risks such as high debt levels, increased deficits, unemployment, bankruptcies, increased poverty and inequality during the recovery period. But she said the crisis was also boosting the digital economy, offering a chance to boost transparency and e-learning, and give even small firms access to markets.

Asked about renewed tensions between the United States and China — the world's two largest economies, Georgieva said she was urging member countries to maintain open communication and trade flows that had underpinned global growth for decades. "We do need

to keep trade flows open, especially for medical supplies, food, and longer-term to find a pathway to overcome what is happening now with this crisis," Georgieva said. "We want to continue to build this more prosperous future for all by overcoming the scarring that may come from this crisis."

Tensions between the United States and China have spiked in recent weeks, with officials on both sides suggesting a hard-won deal that defused a bitter 18-month trade war could be abandoned months after it was signed. Georgieva warned against retreating into protectionism as a result of the crisis.

"We should not turn away from what has worked for people everywhere: a division of labor and collaboration and trade, which allows the costs of goods and services to go down, allows incomes to go up, and allows poverty within countries and across countries to retreat," she told Reuters.

The IMF was created after World War Two to foster financial stability, facilitate trade and reduce poverty around the world. It has provided emergency financing to 56 countries since the crisis began and will decide on 47 additional requests as quickly as possible, Georgieva said.

An IMF spokesman said some \$21 billion in emergency financing, which carries very low interest rates, had been disbursed thus far. Georgieva said the Fund could also provide grants to help the poorest countries cover their debt service payments to the IMF through the end of the year, after raising new lending commitments from its members. — Reuters

Companies fear protracted slump: WEF

LONDON: A prolonged global slump and surge in bankruptcies arising from the coronavirus pandemic are the foremost concerns for companies surveyed in a World Economic Forum report yesterday.

Recessions on a scale not seen since the 1930s Great Depression demand more action from governments to ensure a timely recovery and to put growth on a healthier path, the report also said. The survey of 347 company risk managers looked at the biggest concerns for the next 18 months, after the pandemic shuttered large swathes of production and forced massive rescue packages by governments around the world.

They identified the most likely fallout as an extended downturn, a jump in company failures allied with industry consolidation, along with high youth unemployment. The debt accrued in the rescue packages could depress government and corporate finances and retard growth for years, and also stymie efforts to combat climate change, the report said.

The crisis has "revealed the inadequacies of the past", Saadia Zahidi, managing director of the World Economic Forum, said. "We now have a unique opportunity to use this crisis to do things differently and build back better economies that are more sustainable, resilient and inclusive," she said. The WEF organizes an annual meeting of political and corporate leaders in Davos, Switzerland.

Ahead of this year's conclave in January, when the COVID-19 outbreak was still largely confined to China, the forum's annual risk report showed climate change as the biggest concern for companies over the next 10 years. But it also flagged up anxiety that health systems around the world were ill-prepared for another pandemic.

A second wave of COVID-19 was another concern identified in yesterday's report, along with the dangers of cyberattacks and data fraud as much corporate activity shifts online. — AFP

IMF: Full global economic recovery unlikely in 2021

WASHINGTON: The global economy will take much longer to recover fully from the shock caused by the new coronavirus than initially expected, the head of the International Monetary Fund said, and she stressed the danger of protectionism. Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said the Fund was likely to revise downward its forecast for a 3 percent contraction in GDP in 2020, but gave no details. That would likely also trigger changes in the Fund's forecast of a partial recovery of 5.8 percent in 2021.

In an interview with Reuters, she said data from around the world was worse than expected. "Obviously that means it will take us much longer to have a full recovery from this crisis," Georgieva said in an interview. She gave no specific target date for the rebound.

In April, the global lender forecast that business closures and lockdowns to slow the spread of the virus would throw the world into the deepest recession since the 1930s Great Depression. But data reported since then points to "more bad news," Georgieva said earlier this month.

Business

Uber slashing jobs, trimming investment to survive crisis

Company to lay off 3,000 jobs, wind up some businesses

SAN FRANCISCO: Uber on Monday announced it is cutting a quarter of its global workforce and trimming investment to survive the financial hit to its business from the coronavirus pandemic.

The San Francisco-based company is laying off about 3,000 people and stopping some investments unrelated to its core ride-share and delivery businesses, according to chief executive Dara Khosrowshahi.

"Given the dramatic impact of the pandemic, and the unpredictable nature of any eventual recovery, we are concentrating our efforts on our core mobility and delivery platforms and resizing our company to match the realities of our business," Khosrowshahi said.



Uber loses nearly \$3bn due to virus

Overall staff cuts include layoffs earlier this month at Uber recruiting and customer support teams, and are part of a reorganization keeping ride-share and Eats restaurant-meal delivery services priorities at the company. "We are making these hard choices now so that we can move forward and begin to build again with confidence," Khosrowshahi said.

Job cuts are to be spread across Uber operations around the world. Uber planned to provide laid-off workers with at least 10 weeks' pay and continue providing health benefits through the end of this year.

The company did not respond to an inquiry whether layoff news was delivered to employees via video-conferencing. Uber is closing or consolidating offices at various locations, including merging two facilities in its home base of San Francisco. The company also planned to close its office in Singapore in the coming year and relocate its Asia-Pacific base of operations.

Mobility and Delivery

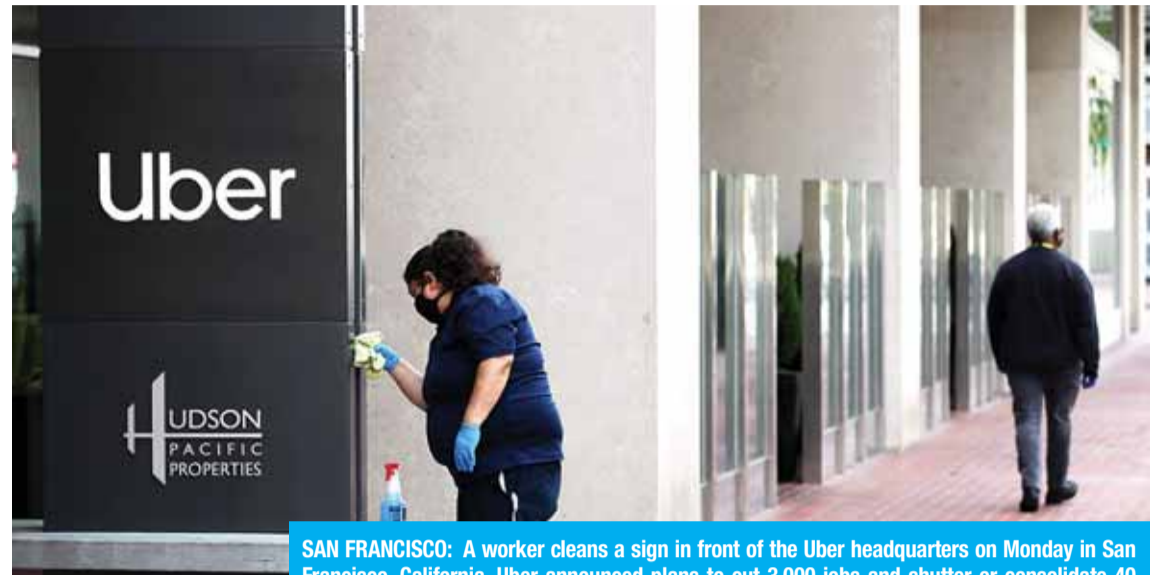
Teams at Uber are being reorganized, with Andrew Macdonald to head a "mobility" team that will include transit and Pierre-Dimitri Gore-Coty taking charge of a "delivery" team. Uber is closing its AI Labs special projects team.

"We are taking a hard look at our overall cost structure and our other bets to ensure our core business of Rides and Eats emerges stronger than ever," Khosrowshahi said on Uber's recent quarterly earnings call. Uber said in its quarterly update that it lost nearly \$3 billion and its rides business was down some 80 percent in April.

The rideshare giant noted, however, that it was seeing strong revenue growth for its Eats food delivery operation. Uber reported 53 percent revenue growth in its Eats restaurant take-away delivery service in the first three months of this year, as more people ordered in to avoid the coronavirus.

Eats revenues rose to \$819 million, about one-third of the total for Uber in the quarter. "There's been a tremendous increase in restaurant sign-ups," Khosrowshahi said during an earnings call with analysts.

"We believe these trends are here to stay." With a network of app-summoned drivers, Uber is in position to expand into delivering groceries, medicine, retail purchases and more with minimal invest-



SAN FRANCISCO: A worker cleans a sign in front of the Uber headquarters on Monday in San Francisco, California. Uber announced plans to cut 3,000 jobs and shutter or consolidate 40 offices around the world due to severely declining business as the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic continues. —AFP

ment, Khosrowshahi added. An IBM survey released this month found more than half of those who used ridesharing apps planned to reduce or stop using these services completely.

Meanwhile, some analysts felt ride-share services or bicycle and scooter options such as those offered by Uber might benefit from people wanting to avoid mass transit while getting around.

It said earlier this month it was leading a \$170 million investment in Lime as part of a plan to merge its

Jump electric bike and scooter operations into the rival service. The tie-up will free Uber to concentrate on its core rideshare and delivery services while Lime—which operates in some two dozen countries—will manage scooters and bikes including the Uber Jump fleet. "The reality is the world has changed, so we don't know when the recovery is going to be," Khosrowshahi said during the earnings call.

"We are going to take the actions that we think are necessary." —AFP

Why Kuwait 5G network is more crucial than ever

By Rico Lin

As the global COVID-19 pandemic spread and over one-third of the world's population went under lockdown, we cannot deny the huge socio-economic impact of the virus on how we live and do business. One of the outcomes of this global disruption is that people's behavior has shifted even more towards the extensive use of digital technologies and online services. From video streaming to e-commerce and the use of video business collaboration tools, our reliance on these technologies has truly become the new normal.

Governments and enterprises alike realize that this digital transformation is not a "nice to have" to improve their service agility. It is a "must do" to ensure survival and business continuity. Technologies such as 5G, cloud, and AI are playing a crucial role in enabling nations to become fully digitalized. Kuwait is no exception.

In particular, the advantages of 5G infrastructure in Kuwait are increasingly clear, with the demand for connectivity rising in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. 5G not only provides faster connection speeds and lower latency to the public, but it is helping to transform emergency healthcare response, provide remote monitoring and diagnosis during patient transfers, and enhance pandemic monitoring platforms. Outside of healthcare, verticals such as education, energy, and security are exploring 5G's potential to solve their most urgent issues, ensuring education continuity, optimizing oil production costs, and much more.

Connected societies like those in Kuwait clearly stand to benefit from the continued roll-out of 5G infrastructure. Telecommunications companies in Kuwait have already started to launch their 5G services, with continuous endeavors to pursue the digital transformation plan outlined in the New Kuwait 2035 vision. More and more requirements for industry digital transformation using 5G are now emerging, and that will speed up 5G network evolution.



Rico Lin

It is also why network security is now being brought under the spotlight. The power and security afforded by 5G are supporting telecom operators to manage a rapid surge in data traffic for applications such as online education and work-from-home policies. Traditional security design focused on the protection of individuals' voice and data. Yet 5G goes beyond serving individuals to empower vertical industries, all of which have diverse security demands.

5G is also different from earlier networks in that it is an ecosystem. Many links are involved for one piece of information to flow from one consumer to another, including devices, transmission equipment, routers, and more. Thankfully 5G networks are not only faster and more agile than 4G, but they have enhanced security features to ensure that industries and communities are more protected than ever before.

We see this security as a necessity for a world that relies increasingly upon the Internet of Things (IoT), AI, big data analysis, and more. For instance, while 5G alone is an upgrade to our communications infrastructure, AI provides us with more powerful computing engines. It is the applications built on both of these platforms that will truly change the way we work and live in Kuwait. We have already begun collaborating with telecom operators and partners in the region to explore such applications in dozens of industries—from healthcare to intelligent connected vehicles, smart factories, smart grids, and so on.

In the end, all of this technology really comes down to one thing: supporting people. Kuwait is already combining the power of 5G, cloud, AI, and other technologies for this goal. Moving forward and in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, we must focus on how new applications can bring value to local communities in times of crisis. By actively tackling the challenges of today through alliances with governments, customers, and partners, Kuwait's telecommunications industry can deliver the standard of service and security that users not only demand, but deserve. Note: Rico Lin is CEO of Huawei Technologies Kuwait

Turkey CB to cut rates a modest 50-pts to 8.25%

ISTANBUL: Turkey's central bank is expected to cut its policy rate by 50 basis points to 8.25 percent this week, a Reuters poll showed on Monday, easing policy for a ninth straight time after it recently trimmed an inflation forecast. The bank has cut its policy rate by 1,525 basis points since July last year in a forceful bid to pull the economy out of a recession and, more recently, to counter the economic downturn brought on by the coronavirus outbreak.

With the outbreak hammering domestic demand, tourism and exports, the central bank last month lowered its inflation forecast for end-2020 to 7.4 percent, from 8.2 percent earlier, opening the door to more rate cuts. The monetary easing is expected despite a 13 percent slide in the lira this year due to concerns over Turkey's depleted foreign reserves and relatively high foreign debt obligations, and to economic fallout from measures to contain the pandemic.

In the Reuters poll of 15 economists, the median estimate was for a cut in the policy rate to 8.25 percent. Estimates ranged from a 25-point cut to 8.5 percent, to a 100-point cut to 7.75 percent.

Plummeting global oil prices have pushed inflation down in import-dependent Turkey, while on the other hand the lira depreciation raises import prices. The lira hit an all-time low of 7.2690 versus the dollar earlier this month before rallying. Bank of America's Ferhan Salman said the central bank sees room to loosen policy given its lower inflation forecast. "We agree (that) low oil prices and weak demand mute FX pass-through to inflation. Weak demand also curbs producers' ability to pass on cost changes to the headline," he wrote in a client note, adding lockdowns could depress services inflation. The median estimate of 10 economists for the policy rate at year-end stood at 8 percent. Some respondents said the bank would hike rates again by then while others said it would continue the easing cycle, with forecasts ranging between 8.75 percent and 7.75 percent. The central bank has slashed rates by 200 basis points, and provided some funding below the policy rate, in order to stimulate the economy since Turkey recorded its first COVID-19 case.—Reuters

Facebook chief wants EU to lead on tech rules

BRUSSELS: Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg on Monday urged the European Union to take the lead in setting global standards for tech regulation or risk seeing countries follow China as a model.

"I think right now a lot of other countries are looking at China... and saying: 'Hey, that model looks like maybe it might work. Maybe it gives our government more control?'" Zuckerberg said, during a video debate with EU commissioner Thierry Breton.



BRUSSELS: Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg on Monday urged the European Union to take the lead in setting global standards for tech regulation or risk seeing countries follow China as a model. —AFP

Under the Beijing model, "you don't have to respect human rights quite as much in how the society gets run," he added. "I just think that that's really dangerous and I worry about that kind of model spreading to other countries," Zuckerberg said. "I think that the best antidote to that is having a clear regulatory framework that comes out of Western democratic countries, and that can become a standard around the world," he argued.

"When Europe sets policies, they often become the standards around the world," he said, citing the EU's GDPR data protection legislation, which has been widely replicated.

Breton, one of the EU's top officials on tech policy, said that Facebook and other big tech companies must also live up to certain values. If you want to have the right regulation "you have to have a clear set of values and in Europe we have these values," he said, hinting Facebook sometimes fell short, especially on controlling illegal content or paying fair taxes.

Lobbying drive

"It is extremely important that when you are CEO, at the end of the day, you are the only one to be responsible," Breton said. "The mission of a CEO is to listen to everyone and then to take the decision. At the end of the day, it will be Mark who will be responsible, nobody else."

The debate came as Facebook embarks on a European lobbying campaign. The European Commission is ramping up towards a Digital Service Act, a major piece of EU lawmaking intended to curb the powers of US big tech.

The law would include all aspects of the digital world, including cracking down on hate speech, protecting user data and preventing big companies from abusing their dominant market positions.

Silicon Valley firms are preparing a furious lobbying counterattack to limit its reach. Left unchecked, the law could force Facebook, Google, Amazon or Apple to split their businesses, provide rivals access to their data and act more as water or electricity utilities and not profit-seeking innovators.—AFP

Cash-strapped Thai Airways to seek revamp

BANGKOK: Thailand's cash-strapped national carrier will look to undergo a restructuring through the kingdom's bankruptcy court, premier Prayut Chan-O-Cha said yesterday as the stricken company is battered by the crash in tourism caused by the coronavirus.

Thai Airways—which is 51 percent owned by the government—has long fought to stay afloat, registering losses of almost \$800 million over the past three years. Its troubles come as the world aviation sector faces its biggest crisis, with borders globally being closed, which has sent a number of airlines either into bankruptcy or forced them to seek massive government help.

Thai Airways' debt was 245 billion baht (\$7.6 billion) at the end of last year, according to local media, which also said it was set to outpace its assets in 2020. Prayut said instead of allowing the airline to go bankrupt, it will ask the insolvency court's for a reorganization that will allow it to set out a debt restructuring plan.

"I am letting Thai Airways submit into the rehabilitation plan and we will not let them go bankrupt as it will affect more than 20,000 lives," he said in a televised address after a cabinet meeting yesterday.

"It is the one way that the airline can operate and the staff still have a job," he said, adding the government would not provide financial support.

In a statement after the announcement, the airline said it "will not be dissolved or go into liquidation or be



BANGKOK: This file photo shows Thai Airways aircraft parked on the tarmac at Suvarnabhumi Airport in Bangkok. Thailand's cash-strapped national carrier will look to undergo a restructuring through the kingdom's bankruptcy court, premier Prayut Chan-O-Cha said yesterday.—AFP

declared bankrupt". Under Thailand's bankruptcy laws, a company undergoing rehabilitation will not have to repay its creditors during the process, said lawyer Ukrit Detsiri of Price Sanond, which represents international hotel chains and food and beverage companies. Thai Airways creditors will have to work out a "best solution", which could mean debtors can only recover some of their money, said Ukrit. Aviation expert Brendan Sobie said the troubled carrier has tried restructuring in

the past, to no success. "They've had issues with government and political meddling on a lot of decisions," said the Singapore-based analyst. The government was previously mulling a 54 billion baht bailout for the airline, which was met with a public outcry.

Thailand's economy is expected to shrink more than six percent this year as the outbreak shatters the country's crucial tourism industry, with all flights into the country banned until the end of June.—AFP

Business

NBK provides customers with a mobile branch bringing banking to doorsteps

The first bank to provide this service in Kuwait

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) always strives to provide innovative and exceptional solutions to its customers. To this end, since the outset of the global health crisis, the bank has taken various measures and actions to enable customers conduct their banking transactions easily, while keeping in mind the precautionary and preventive measures, in line with the instructions of Ministry of Health and concerned authorities, to protect both customers and employees.

debit card issuance and NBK check deposit and cashing. The NBK mobile branch will provide cash withdrawals from KD 2,000 up to KD 5,000, cash deposit from KD 2,000 up to KD 3,000, and NBK check cashing from KD 2,000 up to KD 5,000.

The branch will also feature an ATM that allows customers to interact through audio and video with an NBK Agent to help them with their banking transactions. The mobile branch will provide services to customers from 8 pm to 12 midnight.

Furthermore, and as part of NBK's adoption of the highest safety standards under the current circumstances, the bank has taken all necessary preventive measures including checking customers' body temperature before entering the mobile branch, and providing them with medical masks and gloves. An NBK staff will also be available in the mobile branch to assist customers and facilitate their banking transactions.

Commenting on the provision of that service, Maitham Al-Salem, ATM Channel Supervisor, National Bank of Kuwait said: "It is not new for NBK to provide exceptional solutions to support its customers, as we consider customer convenience a top priority. And in view of the current circumstances, we have assigned the mobile branch to provide them with various services at their doorsteps."

"Customers can easily request this service through NBK WhatsApp on 1801801. The mobile branch will arrive directly to their doorsteps and provide them with various banking services," Al-Salem added.



Maitham Al-Salem

He pointed out that the bank will announce the area schedule for the mobile branch in advance on the bank's social media channels nbkgroup, so that customers can book their appointment ahead of time, stressing that this service is available only for NBK Customers and that they should have their Civil ID to benefit from the service.

Al-Salem concluded by saying, that NBK tries by all means to provide the best service to customers, and the mobile branch is an important and unique way of facilitating their transactions. The bank is continuously working on providing new solutions to customers under different circumstances and promising them with more in the near future.

Since the outbreak of the novel Coronavirus, NBK provided customers with ongoing banking services through its different channels with a number of branches that were operating before the full lockdown, as well as the digital channels including NBK Mobile Banking and NBK Online Banking, NBK Contact Center and NBK WhatsApp on 1801801, and even through NBK Social Media Channels, where all inquiries are answered as quickly as possible. Furthermore, the bank shares information and guidance related to all aspects of current circumstances on its social media accounts @nbkgroup that attract noticeable interaction from customers.



NBK ensures easy and convenient banking: Al-Salem

In view of the current circumstances, and in a step to serve NBK Customers in a better way, NBK has assigned a mobile branch to reach customers at their doorsteps and help them with their banking transactions.

The mobile branch is a truck vehicle supported with an ATM and an ITM that provides the following services to customers: cash withdrawal and deposit,



LONDON: A pedestrian is reflected a window as she walks by the Bank of England in London.—AFP

BoE revives negative rates talk

LONDON: A chorus of comments from top officials at the Bank of England about negative interest rates has revived talk that the British central bank might resort to cutting borrowing costs below zero to cushion the economy from the coronavirus shutdown.

The BoE has cut rates twice as the COVID-19 crisis escalated in March to a record low of 0.1 percent.

Most economists say its next move will be to add to the firepower of its 645 billion-pound (\$783 billion) bond-buying program as soon as June 18, at the end of its next scheduled meeting.

But investors on Monday began to price in the possibility of the BoE overcoming its long-standing reluctance to take rates below zero from the end of 2020 as it contemplates what could be the biggest economic slump in three centuries. The shift in markets came after the BoE's chief economist, Andy Haldane, said the central bank was looking more urgently at negative interest rates as well as at buying riskier assets.

"The economy is weaker than a year ago and we are now at the effective lower bound, so in that sense it's something we'll need to look at — are looking at — with somewhat greater immediacy," Haldane told the Daily Telegraph newspaper in an interview published late on Saturday. "How could we not be?"

On Monday, rate-setter Silvana Tenreiro talked up the benefits of negative rates, citing the experience of other countries in Europe. "My personal view, which comes from the reading of the European experiences, is that negative rates have had a positive effect in the sense of having a fairly powerful transmission to real activity," she told a London School of Economics webinar. The comments from Tenreiro and Haldane, the latter one of the BoE's most outspoken policy-makers, struck a more urgent note than the message from

Governor Andrew Bailey. Last week, Bailey said taking rates below zero "is not something we are currently planning for or contemplating", but he added it was not wise to rule anything out. Allan Monks, an economist with JP Morgan, said the comments, along with Deputy Governor Ben Broadbent's saying on May 12 the BoE needed to keep on weighing up the pros and cons of negative rates, suggested the central bank was reviewing its stance. "Despite the mixed messaging, it appears the MPC (Monetary Policy Committee) believes this is a debate which is at least worth revisiting," Monks said in an email to clients.

The departure in March of previous governor Mark Carney, who was particularly resistant to going negative, might have created space for fresh discussions, he said. While the European Central and the Bank of Japan have cut their benchmark rates below zero in a bid to get banks to turn their cash into loans and boost economic growth, the BoE has said it believes such a move would be counterproductive, because it would hurt banks and make them less likely to lend. But investors have not missed the apparent willingness to contemplate the question anew.

Rob Wood, an economist with BofA Global Research, said the brevity of the recent comments allowed for misunderstandings, but the BoE seemed to be signalling that 0.1 percent was no longer the floor for rates, and a cut to zero was possible in August.

"We think a policy rate of 0 percent is easier for the BoE to contemplate and they will need to exhaust other options, which will take time, before taking rates negative," Wood said.

Going below zero would further weaken sterling, which is already touching two-month lows against the dollar and the euro because of the prospect of failure in London's post-Brexit trade talks with Brussels.

But saying never to sub-zero borrowing costs no longer made sense, Wood said. "We see the probability of negative rates higher for 2021 than 2020," he said. "We can't rule it out anymore." — Reuters

CBK bonds and related Tawarruq

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced the most recent issues of CBK Bonds and related Tawarruq at a total value of KD 240 million for 6 months with Rate of Return at 1.375 percent.

DME Oman crude up over 100% since output cuts

KUWAIT: Oman crude oil Benchmark trading on Dubai Mercantile Exchange has doubled in price since the record cuts agreed by the OPEC+ group and other major producers were implemented in time for May loading schedules.

Front-month July DME Oman Marker Price on Friday was \$34.95/b, up \$18.13/b from the record low of \$16.82/b on April 28 — an increase of 108 percent. The Marker Price is used by Middle East producers, which include Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman and Dubai in calculating the Official Selling Price (OSP).

Middle East prices have also risen faster than those in Europe, with DME Oman trading at nearly \$3/b over the Brent North Sea benchmark on Friday. DME is the premier international energy futures and commodities exchange in the Middle East. It aims to provide oil producers, traders and consumers engaged in the East of Suez markets with transparent pricing of crude oil.

Launched in 2007, DME has rapidly grown into a globally relevant exchange. Its flagship Oman Crude Oil Futures Contract (DME Oman) contract is now firmly established as the most credible crude oil benchmark relevant to the rapidly growing East of Suez market. Reflecting the economics of the Asian region like no other contract, and the largest physically delivered crude oil futures contract in the world, DME Oman is the world's third crude oil benchmark and the sole benchmark for Oman and Dubai exported crude oil.

Heathrow asks UK to set up 'travel bubbles'

LONDON: Britain should set up "travel bubbles" with low-risk countries to allow the movement of people, instead of bringing in new coronavirus quarantine rules when flights restart, according to Heathrow Airport. British government ministers have said they plan a 14-day quarantine for most people arriving in the country in the coming weeks to try to prevent a second peak of the pandemic.

Airlines have warned the policy will throttle hopes for a travel recovery. Heathrow Airport, which before the novel coronavirus grounded planes was the busiest in Europe, said it had been working with the UK Department for Transport on proposals to allow some unrestricted travel.

"The proposal would create 'travel corridors' or 'travel bubbles' allowing free movement between countries or cities that are very low-risk, but potentially blocking flights from high-risk markets to safeguard public health," the airport said in a statement.

Such a set-up would be much less damaging to the economy than the quarantine policy, it added.

Asked in parliament about the possibility of exemptions to the quarantine scheme, transport minister Grant Shapps said that while it would initially be a blanket approach, the government was in "active discussions" about what more it could do. "We should indeed consider further improvements, for example things like air bridges enabling people from other countries who have themselves achieved lower levels of coronavirus infection to come to the country," he said.—Reuters

US auto plants get back to work after COVID halts

WARREN, United States: Two months after effectively freezing American auto manufacturing, Detroit's "Big Three" on Monday began to get back to business with masks, temperature checks and social distancing protocols to try to prevent coronavirus outbreaks.

Some hourly workers have expressed concerns about the risks of assembly line activity, where staff traditionally have worked side-by-side. But automakers say they will be able to work while practicing social distancing and taking other measures to protect workers. The resumption brings a burst of fresh economic activity across states in the mid-western United States, a key swing area in the upcoming elections.

President Donald Trump is set to visit a Ford plant in Michigan later this week that has been building ventilators and other medical equipment during the pandemic. The relaunch also comes as the US economy continues to bleed millions of jobs in the wake of coronavirus shutdowns that have dimmed expectations for auto sales in 2020, although industry analysts have seen signs of a recovery in recent weeks.

The Big Three closed down in mid-March under heavy pressure from union officials following outbreaks at some facilities.

Balancing health, economy

United Auto Workers spokesman Brian Rothenberg said the labor organization was closely monitoring the situation. "It's still early but I haven't heard of major incidents, and staffing appears to be at or above estimates as people go through protocols," Rothenberg said.

Laruant Gary, a production operator at FCA's truck plant in Warren, Michigan, said keeping six feet can be "very difficult" at times when there are 1,000 workers at the facility.

"I feel a little nervous," Gary said. "I think it's a little soon but I thought we're all going to get through it." Reopening is "a matter of balancing the risk versus reward," said Art Wheaton, a labor expert at Cornell University. "There are thousands of people anxious to get back to work and thousands a bit concerned." General Motors gave workers a flyer that pledged to "monitor the situation, adapt accordingly and make any changes to policy in accordance with the CDC/WHO-recommended employee safety practices."

As they reported to work at plants manufacturing Chevrolet, GMC and other models, GM took the temperature of employees and provided facemasks and other personal protective equipment,

company spokesman Jim Cain said.

Automakers have disinfected work stations, revamped spaces, staggered shift times and installed soap and cleaning equipment throughout the factories. They will also test employees who show COVID-19 symptoms.

GM Chief Executive Mary Barra said earlier this month that the company would resume production "in a very cadenced and thoughtful way," with just one shift before adding more. Ford set return-to-work dates for several plants for the week of May 18, while listing a few factories that would not resume until the week of May 25.

Ford Chief Executive Jim Hackett said that the company's confidence in the restart stemmed from the success of operations in Europe and Thailand, where workers have been brought back without sparking COVID-19 outbreaks. "We have not found an infection in any of those factories," Hackett told NPR.

Hackett said the coronavirus crisis had forced a rethink of plant operations. "Prior to COVID, we would put more than one person in a vehicle as it was moving down the line as they were adding items," Hackett said. "We've reorchestrated that so it's not going to happen."

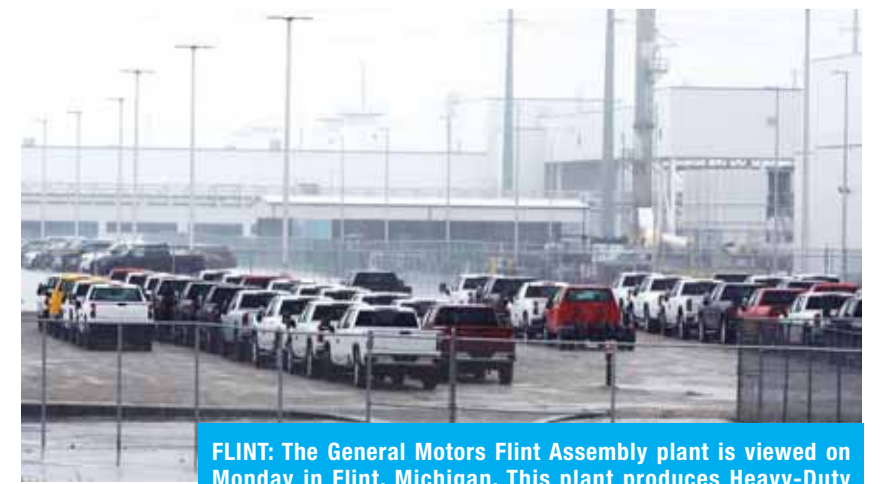
Hit to productivity?

GM is targeting is targeting four weeks to return to pre-COVID 19 production levels. Both Ford and FCA have avoided giving a timeframe. Analysts warn productivity will be lower, at least at first, due to the social distancing measures as well as the hit to global supply chains. Companies may have trouble importing parts from countries still impacted by the coronavirus, or from the resulting backlog once things open.

"The new normal may be a lower volume than we did before," said Charlie Chesbrough, a senior economist at Cox Automotive, pointing to backlogs at Chinese ports. Moody's last week slashed its outlook for 2020 US auto sales to a decline of 25 percent from the prior 15 percent projected drop.

US car sales data from the last few weeks, while still weak, has improved significantly from late March, said Chesbrough. Even in a broadly weak market, US consumers could have trouble this summer finding popular truck and sport utility vehicles due to limited production.

"There may be only white vehicles out there, or not the right trim level," Chesbrough said, adding that COVID-19 hit both auto supply and demand.—AFP



FLINT: The General Motors Flint Assembly plant is viewed on Monday in Flint, Michigan. This plant produces Heavy-Duty Chevrolet and GMC Sierra Crew and Regular Cab Trucks.—AFP

Somalia sees 'massive' rise in FGM during the lockdown and Ramadan

LONDON: Somalia's coronavirus lockdown has led to a huge increase in female genital mutilation (FGM), with circumcisers going door to door offering to cut girls stuck at home during the pandemic, a charity said on Monday. Plan International said the crisis was undermining efforts to eradicate the practice in Somalia, which has the world's highest FGM rate, with about 98% of women having been cut.

"We've seen a massive increase in recent weeks," said Sadia Allin, Plan International's head of mission in Somalia. "We want the government to ensure FGM is included in all COVID responses." She told the Thomson Reuters Foundation nurses across the country had also reported a surge in requests from parents wanting them to carry out FGM on their daughters while they were off school because of the lockdown. FGM, which affects 200 million girls and women globally, involves the partial or total removal of the external genitalia. In Somalia the opening is also often sewn up - a practice called infibulation.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has warned that the pandemic could lead to an extra two million girls worldwide being cut in the next decade as the crisis stymies global efforts to end the practice. Allin said families in Somalia were taking advantage of school closures to carry out FGM so that the girls had time to recover from the ritual, which can take weeks. The economic downturn

caused by coronavirus has also spurred cutters to tout for more business, she said. "The cutters have been knocking on doors, including mine, asking if there are young girls they can cut. I was so shocked," said Allin, who has two daughters aged five and nine.

She said restrictions on movement during the lockdown were making it harder to raise awareness of the dangers of FGM in communities. "FGM is one of the most extreme manifestations of violence against girls and women," said Allin, who has been cut herself. "It's a lifetime torture for girls. The pain continues ... until the girl goes to the grave. It impacts her education, ambition ... everything. The UNFPA, which estimates 290,000 girls will be cut in Somalia in 2020, said the spike was also linked to Ramadan, which is a traditional time for girls to be cut.

UNFPA Somalia representative Anders Thomsen said the pandemic was shifting world attention and funding away from combatting FGM. But he said there were also grounds for optimism, pointing to the recent criminalization of FGM in neighboring Sudan. "There are glimmers of hope and we do hope and believe that may rub off on Somalia, which I would call ground zero for FGM," he said. New data also shows families are beginning to switch to less severe forms of FGM with 46% of 15 to 19-year-olds having been infibulated compared to more than 80% of their mothers.— Reuters

Summer unlikely to curb the virus

WASHINGTON: The higher summer temperatures in the Northern Hemisphere are unlikely to significantly limit the growth of the coronavirus pandemic, according to a Princeton University study published Monday in the journal Science. Several statistical studies conducted over the past few months have shown a slight correlation between climate and the novel coronavirus — the hotter and more humid it is, the less likely the virus is to spread. But the findings remain preliminary, and much remains unknown about the exact relationship between climate and COVID-19.

The Princeton study does not rule out the correlation entirely but concludes that the impact of climate on the spread of the virus is "modest." "Our findings suggest, without effective control measures, strong outbreaks are likely in more humid climates and summer weather will not substantially limit pandemic growth," the study said. "We project that warmer or more humid climates will not slow the virus at the early

stage of the pandemic," said Rachel Baker, a postdoctoral research associate in the Princeton Environmental Institute (PEI).

While climate, particularly humidity, plays a role in the spread of other coronaviruses and the flu, the study said a more important factor is the absence of widespread immunity to COVID-19. "We do see some influence of climate on the size and timing of the pandemic, but, in general, because there's so much susceptibility in the population, the virus will spread quickly no matter the climate conditions," Baker said. Baker said the spread of the virus seen in countries such as Brazil, Ecuador and Australia indicates that warmer conditions do little to halt the pandemic. "It doesn't seem that climate is regulating spread right now," Baker said.

Without strong containment measures or a vaccine, the coronavirus may continue to infect a large proportion of the world's population, the researchers said, and only become seasonal later, "after the supply of unexposed hosts is reduced."

"Previously circulating human coronaviruses such as the common cold depend strongly on seasonal factors, peaking in the winter outside of the tropics," said co-author Bryan Grenfell, professor of ecology and evolutionary biology at PEI. "If, as seems likely, the novel coronavirus is similarly seasonal, we might expect it to settle down to become a winter virus as it becomes endemic in the population," Grenfell said.

For the study, the researchers conducted simulations on how the pandemic would respond to various climates. They ran scenarios based on what is known about the effect seasonal variations have on similar viruses. In all three scenarios, climate only became a mitigating factor when large portions of the human population were immune or resistant to the virus. "The more that immunity builds up in the population, the more we expect the sensitivity to climate to increase," Baker said. "If you run the model long enough, you have a big pandemic and the outbreak settles into seasonal infection." — AFP

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In this file photo taken on May 24, 1982, French actor Michel Piccoli (left) and French filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard pose prior to the screening of "Passion" during a Cannes film festival.



In this file photo taken on February 17, 1971, actors Michel Piccoli and Romy Schneider leave after the screening of "Max et les ferrailleurs" by Claude Sautet, in Paris.



In this file photo taken on April 4, 1976, (from left) French actors Serge Reggiani, Romy Schneider (center) and Michel Piccoli pose during the Cesars ceremony (award for French movies or actors).



In this file photo taken on May 13, 2011, French actor Michel Piccoli poses on the red carpet before the screening of "Habemus Papam" presented in competition at the 64th Cannes Film Festival in Cannes.



In this file photo taken on December 19, 1966, French actor Michel Piccoli and French singer and actress Juliette Greco hold each other's hands during their honeymoon, near Paris.—AFP photos

French screen legend Michel Piccoli dead at 94

Michel Piccoli, one of the most original and versatile French actors of the last half century, has died aged 94, his family said Monday. He died "in the arms of his wife Ludivine and his children Inord and Missia after a stroke", the family told AFP. Piccoli — who passed on May 12 — starred in a string of classics which redefined world cinema, from Luis Bunuel's "Belle de Jour" and "The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie" to a typically memorable turn opposite Brigitte Bardot in Jean-Luc Godard's "Contempt" in 1963. Bardot said that though she and the left-wing Piccoli were polar opposites politically, they shared great "mutual esteem". "He had humor and talent," she told AFP. "And he liked my backside," she added cryptically.

A masterful performer with a wickedly malicious edge, Piccoli managed to carve out a hugely prolific career as both an arthouse icon and a kind of French Cary Grant. Like Grant and other Hollywood all-rounders Jimmy Stewart and Gary Cooper, Piccoli was able to adapt himself to virtually any material without altering his essential everyman screen persona. Emmanuel Macron called Piccoli a "giant" in the industry who, with "his immense power of metamorphosis," was "the most complete and most eclectic actors in French cinema," according to a statement from the French presidency. "You did not direct Piccoli. You filmed him," said Gilles Jacob, the former head of the Cannes film

festival, who led the tributes to a man who he said was "as indispensable to France as water, sun and wind".

Actor and activist

With his bald forehead, vast eyebrows and sly grin, he hopped easily from seducer to cop to gangster to pope, with a particular predilection for ambiguous and cynical roles. Yet despite his omnipresence, with Bunuel alone casting him in six of his films, Piccoli never won a French Oscar — the Cesar — despite being nominated four times, including for Louis Malle's last film "Milou in May" and Jacques Rivette's "La Belle Noiseuse" in 1991. He did, however, win best actor at Cannes in 1980 for playing a tortured Italian judge in Marco Bellocchio's "A Leap in the Dark" and the following year shared best actor at the Berlin festival for "Une étrange affaire".

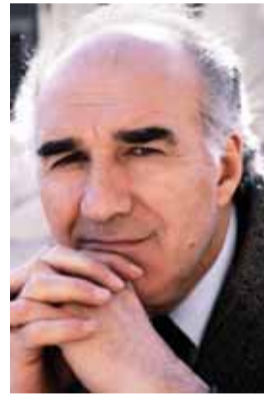
Piccoli was a life-long activist and former communist who counted the philosophers Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre among his friends, but that did not stop him raging against repression in the old Eastern Bloc and supporting the Polish trade union, Solidarity. Its struggle was one of a long list of causes he supported. Having witnessed Jews being rounded up in occupied Paris as a teenager, he could not bear people to say that "they did not know" about the suffering of others. One of his best known films outside France was Marco Ferreri's 1973 "La

Grande Bouffe", in which a group of male friends shut themselves up in a house with prostitutes and try to eat themselves to death.

'I don't put on an act'

"I do not put on an act... I slip away behind my characters. To be an actor you have to be flexible," Piccoli said. In a career stretching over 150 films Piccoli worked with some of cinema's greatest directors including Jean Renoir, Alain Resnais, Alfred Hitchcock, Jean-Pierre Melville, Jacques Demy, Agnes Varda and Claude Sautet, as well as Bunuel, Godard and Malle. Born into a family of musicians of Italian origin, his last major role was in Nanni Moretti's "We Have a Pope" in 2011, where he played a pontiff crippled by panic attacks.

He was married three times, first to actress Eleonore Hirt, with whom he had a daughter, then for 11 years to the singer Juliette Greco and finally to writer Ludivine Clerc. Right up to his late 80s, he never stopped acting, writing and directing, both for stage and screen. "Age is very important for normal people," he told the French daily Liberation in 2000. "Let's try to be immortal, it is so much more fun." —AFP



This file photo taken in 1976 shows a portrait of French actor Michel Piccoli.

French cinemas get heated over lockdown drive-in

French cinema owners are up in arms because a drive-in film festival is beating the country's lockdown while they are forced to stay closed. They are angry at a travelling drive-in film festival which began in the southwestern city of Bordeaux this weekend, and which is set to cross the country showing a mixture of arthouse films and crowd-pleasing French hits. The federation of French cinema owners (FNCF) said that the festival and a plethora of other outdoor projections were leeching audiences away when "local and national authorities should be concentrating on battling to reopen cinemas". The drive-in festival gets around French coronavirus social distancing restrictions by having the audience stay in their cars to watch the films.

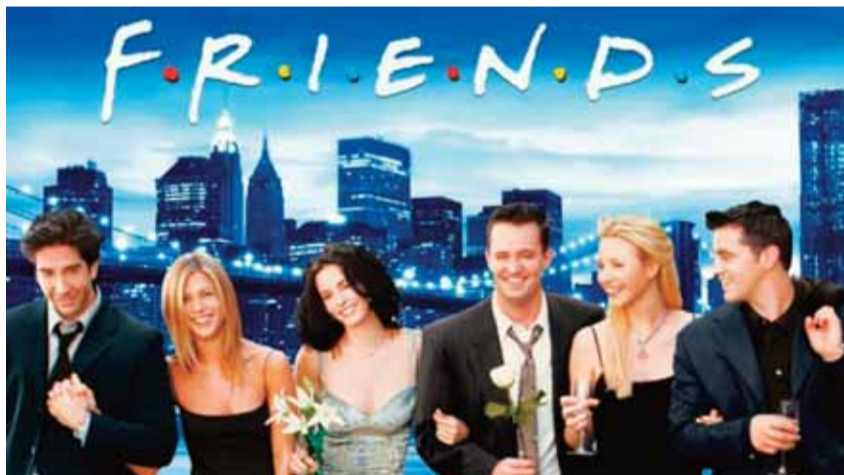
Although the lockdown in France was relaxed somewhat last week, restrictions remain tight in a large swathe of the country including the capital Paris. While most shops have reopened, there is little prospect of cinemas opening their doors till at least July. And even then it will be with social distancing measures that could mean that screenings may have to be up to three-quarters empty.

Cannes drive-in

But the organizers of the Drive-in Festival told AFP that they were not trying to take the bread from cinema owners' mouths. Mathieu Robinet, a former

head of BAC Films, one of Europe's leading independent film production companies, said that they "simply wanted to give people a chance to experience some culture during confinement" and that the festival was not a money-making venture. He said that the festival relied on 35 volunteers to help stage it and was always meant to be temporary.

He said it would stop showing the Oscar-winning South Korean film, "Parasite" and French films "Sink or Swim" and "Invisibles" when cinemas were allowed to reopen. But the FNCF has demanded that the authorities enforce lockdown restrictions to the letter on the festival, which is due to travel to the southern city of Marseille later this month, before moving to northern France. "There is no reason why these initiatives should escape the rules and put spectators and staff in danger," it added. The federation also called for a ban on all outdoor film screenings until after the pandemic, saying it was "impossible to guarantee people would self-distance properly at these gatherings." Meanwhile, with the world's biggest film festival in Cannes cancelled because of the virus, the Riviera resort is trying to keep the festival spirit alive with drive-in screenings of its own in a car park looking out on the Mediterranean later this week.—AFP



Friends reunion special on HBO Max could be filmed 'at the end of summer'

The 'Friends' reunion special could be filmed "by the end of the summer". The stars of the hit sitcom — Jennifer Aniston, Courteney Cox, David Schwimmer, Matthew Perry, Lisa Kudrow, and Matt LeBlanc — were due to reunite for a one-off reunion for HBO Max later this month, but the project was delayed indefinitely due to the coronavirus pandemic. And now, WarnerMedia Entertainment and Direct-to-Consumer chairman Bob Greenblatt has confirmed production is set to go ahead in the summer, as long as lockdown measures have been lifted in time. Speaking to Variety, he said: "At first we thought, shows will be delayed

for a month or two at the most, and now it seems like it's going to be far longer than that. We're holding out for being able to get this special done hopefully by the end of the summer, if the stars align and hopefully we can get back into production. We do think there's a value to having a big, raucous live audience to experience these six great friends coming back together and we didn't want to just suddenly do it on a web call with, you know, six squares and people shooting from their kitchens and bedrooms." —Bang Showbiz

Vienna Philharmonic says no increased virus risk for orchestras

Vienna's prestigious Philharmonic Orchestra said Monday that a study into how far musicians' breath travels when playing instruments showed they faced no added risk of transmitting the novel coronavirus when performing. The orchestra's musicians took part in an experiment involving devices being inserted into their noses which made a fine mist visible when they breathed. The experiment established that "we should not expect air exhaled by an artist to reach more than 80 centimetres' distance," according to a statement from the orchestra sent to AFP on Monday. This maximum distance of breath droplets was emitted by flute players while for the string section

there was no observable change in how far the breath travelled between playing or being at rest.

The study concluded that there was no increased risk for musicians playing together in an orchestra as long as they observed at least a metre's distance from each other. Since mid-April Austria has been loosening its coronavirus lockdown in stages and from the end of May, theatre and music performances will be permitted for audiences of up to 100 people. From July 1 the limit will go up to 250, with cinemas also set to re-open.—AFP

Billie Eilish files restraining order against alleged stalker

Billie Eilish has filed for a restraining order against an alleged stalker. The 18-year-old singer reportedly filed the documents with the help of legal firm McPherson Ltd, where she alleged a man named Prenell Rousseau has been visiting her house on multiple occasions. According to TMZ, the 24-year-old man began showing up last Monday, when he rang the doorbell and spoke to Billie's father through the Ring camera set up she has outside her house. In the papers, Billie says her father asked if he could help the man, to which he responded: "I think I might have the wrong house, but does Billie Eilish live here?" Billie's father told Prenell he had the wrong house, but the man allegedly showed up again later in the day, and the 'Bad Guy' hitmaker claims he began to exhibit "erratic behaviour".

She wrote in the papers: "While we waited for security, Mr. Rousseau remained on our porch, sat down and began to read a book, while also continuing to engage in a periodic monologue. My father repeatedly asked him to leave, but he refused." Security shooed him away, but he allegedly returned a little while later and laid down behind a wall, ready to spend the night.

Prenell allegedly reappeared on last Tuesday and began trying the door handle to gain entrance. Billie claims the man showed up a total of seven times over the past week, and on top of safety concerns, she is also said to be worried about the possibility of Prenell carrying coronavirus. The 'Ocean Eyes' singer says Prenell only wore a face mask on two visits to her house, and he pulled it down whilst talking to security. Billie also claims he didn't wear gloves, and so could potentially have spread the virus to her doorbell and doorknob, which could then be touched by members of her family.—Bang Showbiz



Spectators in their vehicle attend a drive-in movie screening of Hippocrates by French director Thomas Lilti, on Place des Quinconces in Bordeaux, as part of the Drive-in Festival.—AFP



Billie Eilish

Lifestyle | Features

UK royal 'swan marker' confirms census cancellation

The man who counts swans on England's River Thames on behalf of Queen Elizabeth II on Monday confirmed that this year's census had been cancelled due to the coronavirus outbreak. The so-called Swan Upping, a royal tradition dating back to the 12th century, was due to take place over five days in July along a length of the river west of London. Crowds typically gather to watch the Swan Uppers in scarlet uniforms on traditional rowing skiffs as they measure, weigh and check the swans. Many schools are also invited.

David Barber, the monarch's Swan Marker, said: "Although not unexpected, it is of course disappointing that members of the public and local schoolchildren will not be able to enjoy Swan Upping this year. "It is always a great opportunity for the young people who attend to learn about mute swans, and see first-hand the health checks we carry out

on every single family of swans along the river." The queen owns all Britain's unmarked swans and they are counted and measured every year in a ceremony that dates back to 1186. The event was last cancelled in 2012 due to flooding, according to newspaper reports.

Swans were an important source of food when the census first started, but the count has continued in modern times for wildlife conservation and education purposes. "Swan Upping plays an important role in the conservation of the mute swan," said the website royalswan.co.uk, which is dedicated to the census. "Cygnets are extremely vulnerable at this early stage in their development and Swan Upping affords an opportunity to help both adults and cygnets that might otherwise go untreated."—AFP



In this file photo, captured swans and cygnets are measured and checked during the annual Swan Upping Census on the River Thames at Staines, west of London.—AFP

Puppy scammers target lonely Aussies during lockdown

Australia is suffering a wave of puppy scams as fraudsters target the lonely and locked down with fake online offers of cavoodles, French bulldogs and other popular pooches, authorities said. The consumer watchdog ACCC said the scammers fleeced people looking for a new pet out of some Aus \$300,000 (US\$196,000) in April alone, five times higher than the normal monthly average. "A lot of people are stuck at home and going online to buy a pet to help them get through the loneliness of social isolation," ACCC Deputy Chair Delia Rickard said. "Unfortunately the rush to get a new pet and the unusual circumstances of COVID-19 makes it harder to work out what's real

or a scam." With restrictions on travel making it harder for people to see dogs in-person, scammers will often ask for upfront payments to cover transport and then disappear, Rickard said. "Unfortunately once you make the payments, the seller will cease all contact." In a statement released this week, the ACCC said cavoodles and French bulldogs were among the most popular breeds used to lure potential puppy owners. It comes amid a soaring demand for pets during the pandemic with RSPCA New South Wales reporting a dramatic rise in adoption and foster inquiries last month. —AFP

Former Disney exec named TikTok boss

Former Disney executive Kevin Mayer will become the head of TikTok and chief operating officer of the popular video app's parent company, the group announced Monday. Mayer's surprise jump from one of the entertainment industry's most venerable companies is

another victory for buzzy upstart TikTok, which has seen a surge in popularity among people locked down during the coronavirus pandemic. Mayer headed Disney's direct-to-consumer offerings, where he oversaw the successful rollout of Disney+ tel-



In this file photo honoree Kevin Mayer from the Walt Disney Company arrives at CoachArt Gala Of Champions at The Beverly Hilton Hotel in Beverly Hills, California.—AFP

vision streaming service. His new realm will include TikTok and global development at the app's parent company, Beijing-based ByteDance, according to the business. He will report directly to ByteDance founder and chief executive Yiming Zhang. "Kevin's wealth of experience building successful global businesses makes him an outstanding fit for our mission of inspiring creativity for users globally," Zhang said in a release. Mayer's job at Disney included managing Hulu, ESPN+ and Hotstar operations on the direct-to-consumer platform, according to ByteDance. "I'm excited to help lead the next phase of ByteDance's journey," Mayer said in the release. ByteDance owns TikTok, whose kaleidoscopic feeds of 15 to 60-second video clips feature everything from hair-dye tutorials to dance routines and jokes about daily life. Since launching in 2017, TikTok has been downloaded more than two billion times, according to US-based research agency SensorTower. It has huge followings in India, the US, Indonesia and elsewhere.—AFP



Workers pose as they pick "Centifolia" roses for perfumery Christian Dior.

MASKS BLOSSOM AMONG ROSES AT FRENCH PERFUME CAPITAL

May roses are blooming in Grasse, the birthplace of French perfumes, but out in the fields, some of those who pick them face a problem this year. "Working with a mask and not smelling," the flowers, "is pretty frustrating," horticulturist Carole Biancalana acknowledges. Owner of the Domaine de Manon which works with the Dior fashion house, she nonetheless told her seasonal workers they must wear a mask owing to the risk of catching the coronavirus. Biancalana can still tick off a list of adjectives to describe the "complex, multiple and varied" scent of the centifolia rose, a fragile variety that cannot even stand by itself in a vase. "It is somewhere between honey, spicy, fruity, lychee, it is a perfume all by itself," she sighs.

After two months of confinement marked by resounding silence broken only by buzzing bees, the gathering of rose petals began over a week ago and continues depending on the weather, under extra sanitary precautions. "Normally, everyone grabs a snack, we help each other out and go down the rows facing each other, we chat and it's nice," Biancalana says. This year, each worker has a separate row, starting at 9:00am and stopping before 1:00pm when the sun gets too hot. The rose's temperature and chemistry are paramount criteria in the gathering process. "We are 'timed'. The rose has odour molecules that work at certain hours," explains Vincent Rossi, who at 26 is one of the youngest workers. Biancalana adds that they must also demonstrate "rapidity, dexterity and delicacy: you must pluck without breaking buds that will flourish in the coming days."

'Break its neck'

Working by hand, "the goal is to not touch the heart of the rose. You take it just below the peduncle, and hop, break its neck," Vincent explains. Each worker has a personalized burlap bag to contain the risk of contamination, and only one

person drives to a collection site where the pink petals tumble into extraction vats. Biancalana inherited the three hectares (more than seven acres) cultivated by her family and rents another plot under a local plan to foster perfume plants. In 2018, Grasse was included on a Unesco heritage list owing to its

agricultural engineer. Russo's arms bear scratch marks, not from rose bushes but from bitter orange trees that have just been picked around the nearby town of Vallauris. Flowers from those tree are used to produce neroli, a natural fixing agent in perfumes.

France's confinement, which lasted



Workers gather with full bags during the picking of "Centifolia" roses.

decades of know-how in the perfume sector. But budding horticulturists have trouble finding land in this coveted sector of France's Cote d'Azur where housing is also at a premium.

Steep entry fee

"It costs at least 30 euros a square meter," Biancalana notes, or well over \$100,000 an acre. "It is hard to make a profit, given all the other investments required," she says. Her solution was a partnership with the Dior house that ensures a guaranteed revenue in exchange for respecting a set of specifications established by the luxury brand. "Acquiring land is basically out of the question," confirms Morgane Russo, an intern who is mulling setting up shop on her own after working abroad as an

eight weeks, made things harder there too, said Guillaume Gillet, head of the local Nerolium cooperative that works with Chanel. Pickers were wary of coming to work in the region, he said. As is the case with those who grow roses, the prices paid for the orange flowers are secret, and everyone wants to increase production. "This year we exceeded five tonnes, up from four last year," Gillet confided. That is far from what the region provided a century earlier, when annual production was around 1,800-2,000 tons. As for centifolia roses, yearly output is roughly 100 times less than a century ago.—AFP



A worker picks "Centifolia" roses for perfumery Christian Dior, at Domaine de Manon in Grasse, southern France.—AFP photos



A worker inspects a bag during the picking of "Centifolia" roses.



Carole Biancalana (center) joins others during the picking of "Centifolia" roses.



A worker looks at bushes during the picking of "Centifolia" roses.

Empty middle seat? Depends on which country you are flying in

SYDNEY/BEIJING/HELSINKI: In Thailand, you cannot have food or water in flight and must wear a mask. In Malaysia and Indonesia, the plane needs to be half-empty. In the United States and Europe, it's not mandatory for airlines to leave the middle seat open. Measures to stem the spread of coronavirus have changed how people travel, as Beijing resident Feng Xueli, 26, found when she took a domestic flight this month. The aircraft was full - allowed under the Chinese rules.

"We needed to wear a mask during the flight and there were PA announcements basically asking for our cooperation with these anti-virus measures put in place, which made me a bit nervous," Feng said. "You also need to go through a lot of temperature checks and security checks when you leave the airport."

Travellers, airlines and airports are grappling with a hodgepodge of rules put in place during the pandemic that will make flying different in almost every country. "When flying restarts, you are already working against the clock. There is still a latent fear of travel," said Subhas Menon, head of the Association of Asia Pacific Airlines. "It's not going to be such a smooth passage when you travel because of all of the measures that are going to be introduced."

A little more than a year after uneven national responses

to the grounding of the Boeing 737 MAX, the industry is once again facing piecemeal regulation. The last trigger for such widespread changes in the way airlines operate was the 2001 attacks in the United States, which ushered in new security measures. "People globally have understood the security requirements that came after 9/11. We would like to see that kind of standardisation of protocols," said Boeing vice-president Mike Delaney, leader of Boeing's Confident Travel Initiative.

Onboard service is changing too. Business-class meals, once a selling point for premium carriers hiring celebrity chefs, have been reduced to pre-packaged items on carriers including Emirates, Air Canada and British Airways. Automation is also increasing, as carriers such as Qantas Airways Ltd ask passengers to check in online to limit contact with staff and other fliers. "More than ever, the industry will work towards the vision of an entirely mobile-enabled journey," said Sumesh Patel of technology provider SITA, which hopes to benefit from the trend.

On the airplane, one of the biggest debates has been over whether middle seats should be empty. That would limit airplanes to two-thirds of their normal capacity, not enough for most airlines to make a profit without increasing fares. Afif Zakwan, 20, recently took a Malaysia Airlines domestic flight

that was exempt from the requirement to fly half-empty. He said he was comfortable being on a full domestic flight, but would not consider flying internationally for now.

"As more and more people travel for whatever reason, confidence and the power of word of mouth experiences will shape the... recovery," said Mayur Patel of data firm OAG Aviation. An official at the Japan Civil Aviation Bureau said the issue of an open middle seat, which could create unfair advantages if applied unevenly, was "controversial". "It's crucial that countries where flights depart coordinate their responses with countries where they arrive," said the official, who was not authorized to speak publicly.

Despite the call for common standards, some nations are applying their rules just to airlines registered in their country, while others are applying them to foreign carriers. US carriers are among those requiring passengers and crew to wear facial coverings, and have also endorsed temperature checks.

In Europe, airlines are largely resisting calls to leave the middle seat empty but have publicized other changes designed to reassure passengers. "You have to remember an aircraft is not the natural place to do social-distancing, so you need to mitigate the health risks by other means, and facial masks are a good example of those means," Finnair Plc Chief Executive Topi Manner told Reuters.

Meanwhile, jet manufacturers and airlines are launching an urgent initiative to convince nervous travelers that the air they breathe on planes is safe, believing this is critical to rebuilding a travel industry floored by the novel coronavirus. Boeing has appointed former engineering and development chief Mike Delaney to head wider efforts to build confidence, and Airbus leaders say the industry is moving from an initial crisis phase to securing public trust.

That has triggered, among other things, a concerted effort to explain how cabin air filtration works in a bid to scotch the myth that the pressurized fuselage contains only static or recycled air. Health officials are still quantifying various sources of transmission for COVID-19 disease caused by the virus, but attention focuses on the risk of catching it from airborne droplets from coughing or sneezing passengers as well as from touching infected surfaces.

The air-travel industry historically talks more about seat pitch than air quality. That's had to change as a result of the pandemic. "It's about explaining what we do for the safety of passengers in the large sense: aircraft safety but also sanitary safety," Airbus engineering head Jean-Brice Dumont said. In an office building, air is exchanged about four times every hour. On a modern jet aircraft, that rises to 20 to 30 times. — Reuters

Trump taking HCQ despite...

Continued from Page 1

Trump has often played down the dangers of coronavirus, including last week when he said it threatened only a small number of people. He also pointedly refuses to wear a mask, despite federal recommendations to do so and the fact that most of his staff have taken to covering their faces in public. A personal valet to Trump has tested positive for the coronavirus, as has Katie Miller, Vice President Mike Pence's press secretary.

Trump said his use of the medicine was approved by the White House physician, Sean Conley. However, Trump insisted that he, not the doctor, took the first step. "I asked him, 'what do you think?'" He said, "if you'd like it." I said "yeah, I'd like it." Conley later issued a statement saying that he had agreed to Trump using the anti-viral drug "after numerous discussions" between them about the pros and cons. "We concluded the potential benefit from treatment outweighed the relative risk," Conley said.

Trump said he has received many "positive calls" from people, whom he did not identify, telling him about the malaria drug. He mentioned a letter he'd received from a New York doctor, also unidentified, who reported giving the medicine to hundreds of

patients and "I haven't lost one."

By contrast, the government's Food and Drug Administration warns against giving hydroxychloroquine for either prevention or treatment of the coronavirus, noting reported side effects including "serious heart rhythm problems in patients with COVID-19." Only emergency use is authorized under temporary rules. Earlier this month, a medical paper out of New York suggested that combining hydroxychloroquine with the dietary supplement zinc sulfate, which has antiviral properties, could create a more effective treatment against coronavirus.

But Matthew Heinz, an Arizona doctor who served under Barack Obama's government, said medicines like hydroxychloroquine are not "benign" and open for unregulated use. "I cannot stress enough how reckless it is to encourage anybody to take hydroxychloroquine or any other unproven remedy," he said in a statement.

Trump signalled, as he has throughout the crisis, that there was nothing to lose by trying possible treatments. "It seems to have an impact, and maybe it does, maybe it doesn't but if it doesn't, you're not going to get sick or die," Trump said. "I take a pill every day. At some point I'll stop." The president said again on Monday that he showed "zero symptoms". "Every couple days they want to test me, you know, for obvious reasons. I mean I am the president, so they want to test me. I don't want to be tested but they want to test me," he said. "I've shown always negative." — AFP

scientists at Peking University have said they are developing a drug that can help stop the pandemic without a vaccine by using antibodies that can neutralize the virus. They are planning clinical trials for the treatment, and are hoping to have the drug available later this year and in time for any potential winter outbreak.

Authorities around the world are keeping an eye on such breakthroughs as the virus continues on its destructive path, with many poorer nations now seeing a dramatic rise in infections even as the caseload eases in more developed parts of the world like Europe. In Indonesia, gravediggers at a cemetery earmarked for COVID-19 victims in the capital Jakarta are struggling to keep up with the number of corpses arriving every day, trying not to touch the bodies and lessen the chance of getting infected themselves. "I've been digging graves for 33 years now and I've never been this tired before," said gravedigger Minar. "This is probably a test from God."

The vast economic damage caused by the virus has led to unprecedented emergency stimulus measures by governments and central banks, and the latest came from Europe where France and Germany laid out a half-trillion-euro fund. The hard-hit continent has seen deaths and hospitalizations drop in recent days, sparking optimism about a post-pandemic recovery.

The daily death count in the United States has also slowed over the last couple of days, as all 50 states began easing lockdown measures to varying degrees. But other parts of the world - especially developing countries - are only just starting to feel the full force of the virus. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said Monday many governments had ignored WHO recommendations. "As a result, the virus has spread across the world and is now moving into the Global South, where its impact may be even more devastating," he warned.

Already, Brazil has overtaken Britain to have the third-highest number of infections in the world with around 255,000 confirmed cases, and the death toll in Latin America and the Caribbean has topped 30,000. In Chile, where the government has imposed strict distancing measures in some areas after a dramatic rise in cases, the economic pressure from lockdowns was brought into sharp focus as violence erupted in a crowded, poor area on the outskirts of the capital Santiago. — AFP

Syrian rebel, regime forces fight in Libya

BEIRUT: While a ceasefire in Syria has reduced combat between rebels and government forces, mercenaries from the two sides are still fighting in Libya on behalf of their Russian and Turkish backers. Turkey supports some Syrian rebels and Libya's UN-recognized Government of National Accord, while Russia supports Syria's President Bashar Al-Assad and Libya's eastern-based strongman Khalifa Haftar.

Ankara and Moscow brokered the recent truce in Syria but fighting is ongoing in Libya, where Haftar's forces have been trying to seize Tripoli for over a year. A recent rapprochement between Assad and Haftar shows the increasing overlap between the two con-

flicts. In March, Libya's parallel eastern government reopened the Libyan embassy in Damascus after it was closed in 2012, while flights resumed recently between the Syrian capital and Benghazi, Haftar's domain 1,000 km east of the Libyan capital.

A recent confidential United Nations report identified 33 flights by Syria's private Cham Wings Airline to Libya this year, believed to be carrying Syrian mercenaries. "It is estimated from ground sources that the number of Syrian foreign fighters supporting (Haftar's) operations is less than 2,000," wrote the UN experts, who are monitoring an arms embargo on Libya.

The experts alleged that Cham Wings flew the Syrians to Libya for three-month contracts with Russian private military company Wagner, who reportedly recruited the mercenaries to fight for Haftar. Moscow denies any role in the presence of Russian mercenaries in Libya. When the UN panel asked Damascus about the flights to Benghazi, the Syrian government said the flights were for civilians, "particularly those Syrians living in Libya". — AFP

New drug could stop pandemic...

Continued from Page 1

a potential "cure" for the disease and shortens recovery time.

Xie said his team had been working "day and night" searching for the antibody. "Our expertise is single-cell genomics rather than immunology or virology. When we realized that the single-cell genomic approach can effectively find the neutralizing antibody we were thrilled." He added that the drug should be ready for use later this year and in time for any potential winter outbreak of the virus, which has infected 4.8 million people around the world and killed more than 315,000.

"Planning for the clinical trial is underway," said Xie, adding it will be carried out in Australia and other countries since cases have dwindled in China, offering fewer human guinea pigs for testing. "The hope is these neutralized antibodies can become a specialised drug that would stop the pandemic," he said.

China already has five potential coronavirus vaccines at the human trial stage, a health official said last week. But the World Health Organization has warned

that developing a vaccine could take 12 to 18 months. Scientists have also pointed to the potential benefits of plasma - a blood fluid - from recovered individuals who have developed antibodies to the virus enabling the body's defenses to attack it.

More than 700 patients have received plasma therapy in China, a process which authorities said showed "very good therapeutic effects". "However, it (plasma) is limited in supply," Xie said, noting that the 14 neutralizing antibodies used in their drug could be put into mass production quickly.

Using antibodies in drug treatments is not a new approach, and it has been successful in treating several other viruses such as HIV, Ebola and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS). Xie said his researchers had "an early start" since the outbreak started in China before spreading to other countries. Ebola drug Remdesivir was considered a hopeful early treatment for COVID-19 - clinical trials in the US showed it shortened the recovery time in some patients by a third - but the difference in mortality rate was not significant.

The new drug could even offer short-term protection against the virus. The study showed that if the neutralizing antibody was injected before the mice were infected with the virus, the mice stayed free of infection and no virus was detected. This may offer temporary protection for medical workers for a few weeks, which Xie said they are hoping to "extend to a few months". — AFP

Cabinet reviews population...

Continued from Page 1

In the first rakat, a worshipper has to utter six "takbirs" (Allahu Akbar) after the "takbiratul ihram" (the opening part of the prayers) and then start reciting surah Al-Fatiha. In the second rakat, there should be five takbirs after the standing up takbir and then surah Al-Fatiha should be recited, the statement explained. A worshipper can perform the prayers alone or along with his family members, it added.

The United Arab Emirates will extend a nightly curfew by two hours from this week after reporting an increase in daily cases of the coronavirus, an official said on Monday. Separately, the country, which had suspended entry of non-Emirati residents on March 19, said it would next month start receiving those with valid residencies stranded abroad whose families are in the UAE, state media reported.

The nationwide curfew, which currently runs from 10 pm to 6 am, would start at 8 pm today until further notice, Saif Al Dhaheeri, spokesman for the National Emergency Crisis and Disaster Management Authority, told a news conference. The UAE on Monday reported 832 infections and four deaths from the virus to take its count to 24,190 with 224 deaths.

The country halted regular passenger flights and closed most public venues to combat the disease but like other Gulf Arab states saw the virus spread among low-income migrant workers living in overcrowded quarters, leading to an increase in testing. Authorities have arranged repatriation flights for citizens and a limited number of residents and to evacuate foreigners. The state news agency said residents with relatives in the UAE could start returning as of June 1 to reunite with family.

Dhaheeri urged those celebrating the Eid al-Fitr holiday that marks the end of Ramadan to avoid family gatherings. He said malls could operate from 9 am to 7 pm during Eid with shoppers allowed to be there for a maximum of two hours. Another official detailed an updated list of penalties for violation of containment measures, including a fine of 50,000 dirhams (\$13,000) for not heeding quarantine orders and 3,000 dirhams for not wearing a face mask or practicing physical distancing in public, or breaking curfew. The official said the public prosecutor would impose penalties of up to six months in prison or a fine of no less than 100,000 dirhams for repeat offenders.

Qatar tightened restrictions on commercial activities on Monday, ordering all shops to close until the end of the month as part of measures to stem the spread of the novel coronavirus. The decision taken at a cabinet meeting exempts pharmacies, food supply stores and food deliveries. Malls and dine-in restaurants were already closed but other stores had still been operating.

The country of some 2.8 million on Monday reported 1,364 new COVID-19 cases, raising the total to 33,969, the second highest infection count after larger neighbor Saudi Arabia among six Gulf Arab states. Its death toll from the virus stands at 15. Qatar, where expatriates make up the majority of the population, has like other Gulf states seen the virus spread among low-wage foreign workers living in cramped quarters.

Other measures approved by the cabinet include requiring all citizens and residents to install a mobile app designed to track COVID-19 cases starting May 22, state news agency QNA reported. No more than two people can be in a car and up to three in a chauffeured vehicle, while buses must operate at half capacity. People can exercise in public near their residence if they practice physical distancing and wear face masks, QNA said. Masks have been mandatory in public places in Qatar since Sunday in an effort to stem the spread of the virus.

Qatar also confirmed 12 cases of COVID-19 at a jail yesterday as campaign group Human Rights Watch warned other prisoners could be at risk of contracting the disease. Two inmates were acutely ill but none had succumbed to the respiratory condition, the Government Communications Office said in a statement which denied there was a widespread outbreak among prisoners.

Human Rights Watch had said in a statement that six non-Qatari detainees "described a deterioration in prison conditions" at Doha's Central Prison. "They said that the prison authorities also further restricted prisoners' limited access to basic medical care," it added describing the situation as "an apparent outbreak". The campaign group has previously warned that cramped, unsanitary conditions in prisons worldwide and in worker accommodation in the Gulf make social distancing impossible and could accelerate the spread of the new coronavirus.

The government said the HRW report was "based on unfounded rumors and speculation from a small number of unverified interviews". "(The) 12 patients were transferred immediately to a secure, purpose-built medical facility... where they have received, or continue to receive, first-class medical treatment," the communications office said. "Two cases reached the acute phase of the illness and were transferred to a designated off-site treatment center where they received first-class health-care before being transferred back to the Central Prison once fully recovered."



MUMBAI: Migrant workers queue outside the CST railway station to return to their hometowns yesterday after the government eased a nationwide lockdown. — AFP

Stars

Daily SuDoku

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

Yesterday's Solution

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

hard

STAR TRACK

Aries (March 21-April 19)

Your mood is good today, Aries, and you're well supported by the people you interact with. The key is bringing intense feelings directly to the virtual table as you experience them. You'll find that other people share similar emotions right now. This combination of energies between all of you is simply magical, even as you communicate remotely. Join together with others on elaborate projects and special events.

Libra (September 23-October 22)

Consciously accept that you're someone unique and special, Libra. Remember this affirmation through the day and let your actions reflect it. This could be an intense day for many reasons, and others might be on edge because of it. Don't be disrupted by anyone freaking out. Whatever the cause, you'll be able to easily handle this intense blast of emotion, because emotions are your forte!

Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Today is one of those intense days in which you feel overpowered by the energy around you. Don't resist this feeling, Taurus. Remember that it's OK to have a little downtime instead of feeling like you have to always be onstage. Being mellow and quiet will do you a world of good. Sink into your emotions and experience them for the power that they can bring to your overall psyche.

Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Today's intensity could work for you in one of two ways, Scorpio. Either you can feel depressed and weighed down by the intense emotionalism that's likely to well up, or you can put this incredible intensity to good use. The choice is yours. Realize that any action you take will be highly charged with feelings. Likewise, others will be extra sensitive about any move you make. Consider their feelings as well.

Gemini (May 21-June 20)

This is your day to shine, Gemini. Everyone else may be squirming under the moment's prevailing energy, but you should be perfectly equipped to deal with any events, global or personal, that come your way. Despite the intense fluctuations in your general mood, things are on the upswing. You'll find that matters will eventually come around your way. All the hard work you've put in lately is starting to pay off.

Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Combine today's grounding force with a bit of emotional intensity from your heart to create a powerful combination of spirit that will surely make an impact on whatever you contact, Sagittarius. The key is to not take yourself too seriously. If you do, there might be incidents that will jump up to give you a thump on the head, reminding you that you're just as human as the rest of us.

Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Give thanks to the people who are most precious to you, Cancer. It's truly a blessing that you're all alive and healthy. You'll find the right words that easily cut to the core issues. Stabilize your strong emotions and use them as fuel for your endeavors. The key today is remembering those who've helped you along the way. Everyone is a sensitive and loving individual, so treat them as such. Have fun with all of them.

Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Your lighthearted attitude won't play well to people with serious things on their mind, Capricorn. It could make you seem detached and insensitive to the grim realities of COVID-19. You get it, but you don't want to dwell on it every moment of every day. You might be better off simply unplugging from the conversation for a little while. Read a good book or magazine. Plan for what you'll do when the world is good again.

Leo (July 23-August 22)

Connect with the stabilizing force of the day, Leo. It's important to keep at least one foot on the ground, as powerful and intense emotions are likely to come sweeping through. This is a good time to do things with as much passion as quarantine and economic conditions allow. Don't hold back. There's no room for any half-hearted attempts. Whatever you do today, give it all or nothing.

Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

You should be able to put on your famous smile this morning and keep it on all day, Aquarius. That means smiling with your eyes from behind your face-mask and advertising your beautiful soul to the world. If other people are sad, sympathize and encourage without actually taking on their problems. Shield yourself from their dark energy while still keeping a window open to let the real you come shining out.

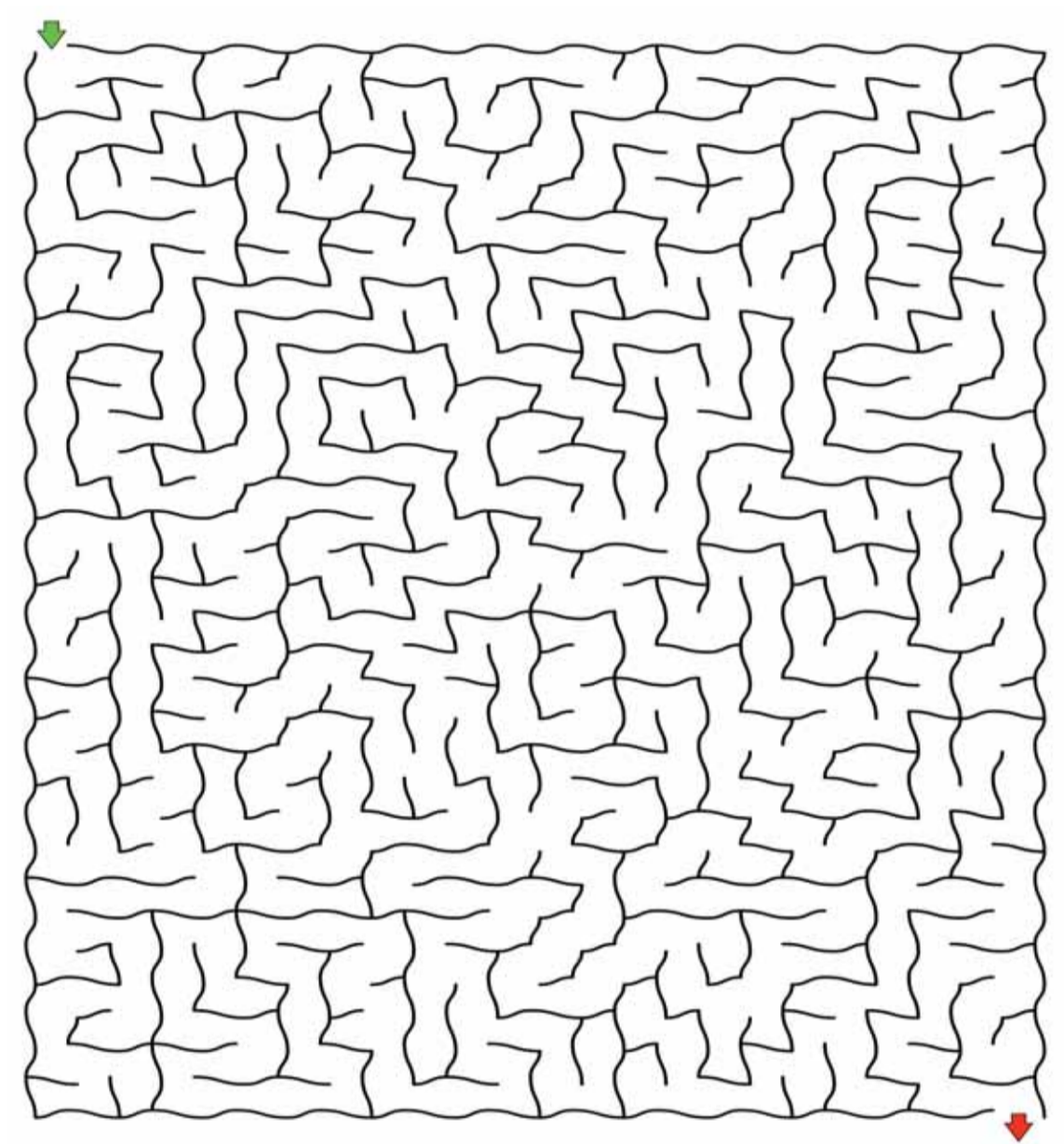
Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Strong opinions might come into conflict with strong emotions today, Virgo. Fountains of intensity could spring from you as if you were a bottomless well. You might need to pay less attention to your logic and concede to the demands of your heart. As a result, it could be challenging to reason with people. If your heart doesn't support what you say, you might as well not say it.

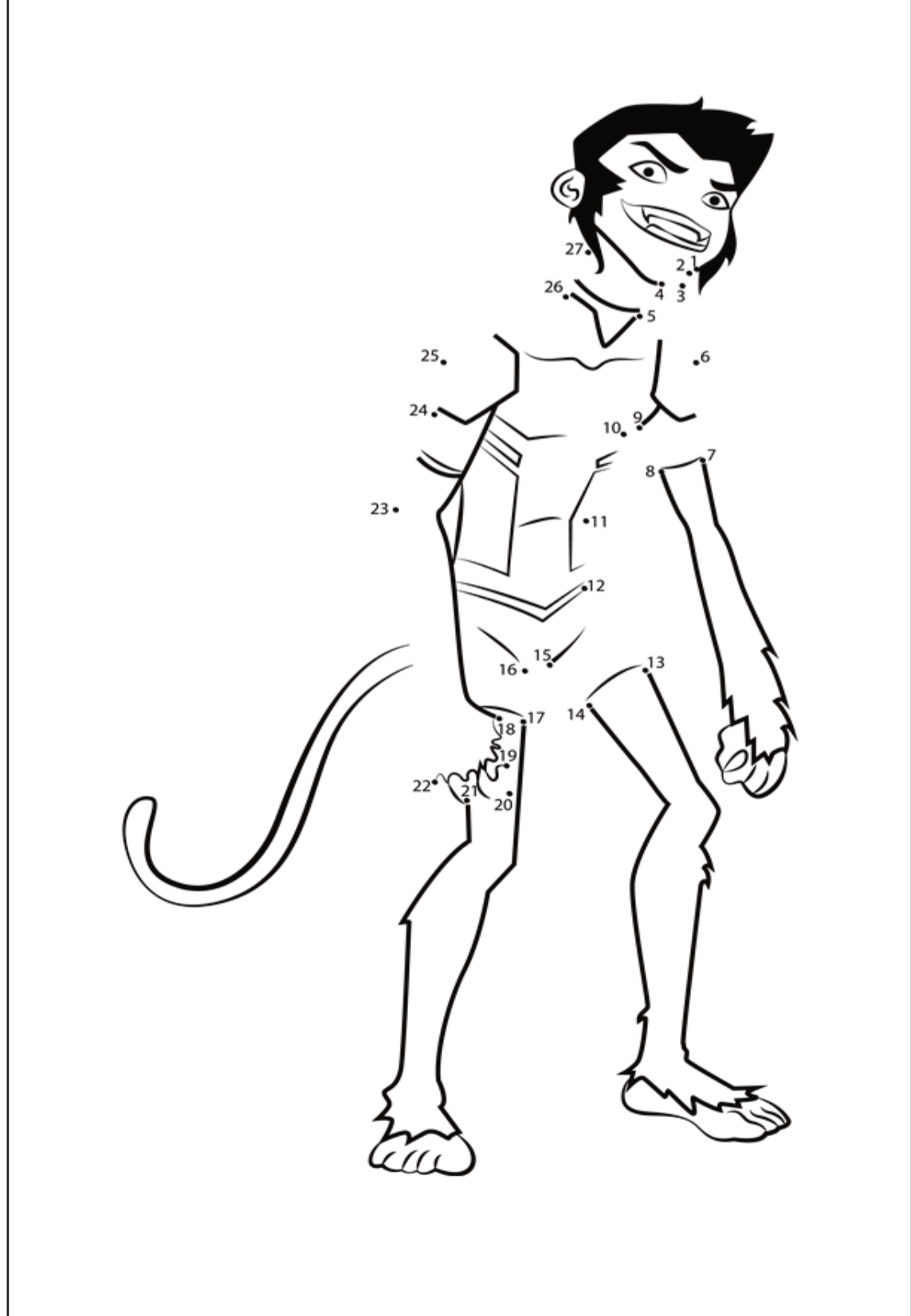
Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Chances are that today will carry an emotional bite that lends a hostile tone to anything you encounter, Pisces. The key is not getting so fixed in your ways that you avoid new experiences. You'll find that interaction with others is exactly what's needed in order to keep things in balance. The masculine and feminine sides of your being are coming together quite nicely.

Find the way



Join the dots



Word Search

Film Directors
Word Search

DIRECTIONS: Find and circle the ALL CAP NAMES in the grid. Look for them in all directions including backwards and diagonally.

Woody ALLEN
Wes ANDERSON
Ingmar BERGMAN
Tim BURTON
James CAMERON
Frank CAPRA
Charlie CHAPLIN
Joel COEN
Francis Ford COPPOLA

O	Q	I	T	R	U	F	F	A	U	T	E	B	K	X	H	R	O	H	M	C	
U	N	Z	E	Y	E	V	M	R	L	U	C	A	S	B	U	Y	I	F	F	C	
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Clint EASTWOOD
Federico FELLINI
John FORD
Howard HAWKS
Werner HERZOG
Alfred HITCHCOCK
Buster KEATON
Stanley KUBRICK
Spike LEE
George LUCAS

Sidney LUMET
David LYNCH
Roman POLANSKI
Martin SCORSESE
Ridley SCOTT
Steven SPIELBERG
Quentin TARANTINO
Francois TRUFFAUT
Orson WELLES
Billy WILDER

Sports

Photo of the day



Alexander Titarenko performs in Ukraine. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

Neutral umpires set to be axed due to virus

LONDON: Cricketers are set to be banned from using saliva to shine the ball due to the coronavirus pandemic, following recommendations by the International Cricket Council. The ICC's influential cricket committee met via conference call on Monday and made the recommendations after a briefing from the governing body's medical advisory committee.

It was unanimously agreed that the "elevated risk of transmission" caused by polishing the ball using spit meant the traditional method must be shelved for now, though sweat will still be permitted. Additionally, it was decided to vote for a suspension to the rule guaranteeing neutral umpires in Test cricket in a bid to minimise travel amid quarantine issues.

No home nation umpire has stood in a Test since 2002. In 1994, the ICC mandated the use of one neutral umpire per Test, which was extended to two eight years later.

The committee also suggested one additional DRS review should be awarded to each team per innings. The measures must now go forward for consideration by the ICC chief executives' committee before being approved.

Former India captain Anil Kumble, who chairs the cricket committee, said: "We are living through extraordinary times and the recommendations the committee have made today are interim measures to enable us to safely resume cricket in a way that preserves the essence of our game whilst protecting everyone involved." — AFP

NHL boss Bettman eyes eight or nine sites for 12-team return groups

NHL looking to finalize two-hub system

NEW YORK: National Hockey League commissioner Gary Bettman said Monday the league is looking at eight or nine locations where about 12 teams could play in plans to restart the 2019-20 season.

The news comes amid reports the NHL is looking to finalize a two-hub system with 12 clubs at each site, with Las Vegas and Edmonton said to be among cities under consideration.

The 31-team NHL shut down March 12 due to the coronavirus pandemic with about 3 1/2 weeks remaining in the regular season ahead of a planned two-month playoff run.

Bettman gave a digital interview at virtual sports business conference Leaders Week, saying he had no timetable for a return to competition according to an NHL website posting.

"I don't think anybody has a fixed timetable, particularly in North America right now," Bettman said. "We have been working very hard since we took the pause on March 12 to make sure that whatever the timing is, whatever the sequencing is, whatever physical ability we have in terms of locations to play, that we're in a position to execute any or all of those options."

"There's still a great deal of uncertainty." There are major border crossing and quarantine issues for the NHL to contend with because 17% of league players are outside North America and facing two weeks of isolation when they return to the United States, with US and Canadian border issues

also a factor.

Having 12 teams at each site, likely split between Eastern and Western conference venues, would eliminate bottom clubs in each but allow more than the usual eight playoff teams per conference.

Rinks in each hub would need to host multiple games a day without spectators, something most NHL arenas could do with multiple locker rooms that could be sanitized as teams enter and leave.

Sufficient hotel space and testing capacity for the deadly virus that wouldn't come at the expense of medical workers would also be crucial to any comeback scenario.

"We certainly can't be jumping the line in front of medical needs," said Bettman. A Return to Play Committee, which includes representatives of the NHL Players Association, still faces many questions, Bettman said.

"Do we complete the regular season when we're given the opportunity?" Bettman asked. "Do we do an abbreviated regular season... do we go right to the playoffs?... do we do it in a centralized location or locations? "I believe that all of the major sports in North America are going through this same exercise, and while the medical and health issues are probably to some extent the same for all of us, the logistics of what we do and how we do it may be a little different depending on the sport."

"I think the major sports and their franchises will get through this and will come back as strong as



MISSOURI: File photo taken on January 23, 2020 NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman speaks to the media prior to the 2020 NHL All-Star Skills Competition at Enterprise Center in St. Louis, Missouri. Bettman said the league is looking at eight or nine locations where about 12 teams could play in plans to restart the 2019-20 season. — AFP

ever. It's just a question of time."

Bettman says the NHL could wait as late as December before starting a 2020-21 campaign and has said he hasn't considered not awarding a Stanley Cup in 2020.

"We'd like to award the Stanley Cup," Bettman said. "And our fans are telling us overwhelmingly that's what they'd like us to do, because people have

an emotional investment in this season already."

Bettman said he thinks fans will return as allowed by medical breakthroughs, although sanitizers, masks and reduced seating configurations could be among the things spectators would have to tolerate.

"Everything we do is going to be governed by the doctors, the medical people and by governments at all levels," Bettman said. — AFP

USGA scraps qualifying for US Open

NEW YORK: The US Golf Association is cancelling qualifying for the US Open, which remains scheduled for Winged Foot in Mamaroneck, New York, in September.

The major championship was originally set for June 18-21 at Winged Foot, and postponed as part of the major revision of the international golf calendar in the face of the coronavirus pandemic.

While the US Open remains on course for September 17-20, the USGA said that the usual local, sectional and final qualifying would not take place. "As you can imagine, this was an incredibly difficult decision, as qualifying is a cornerstone of USGA championships," said John Bodenhamer, senior managing director of Championships for the USGA.

The governing body said the fields for the US Open and the US Women's Open would be filled entirely through exemptions, with information regarding expanded exemption categories to be made available in the coming weeks.

"We take great pride in the fact that many thousands typically enter to pursue their dream of qualifying for a USGA championship and we deeply regret that they will not have that opportunity this year," Bodenhamer said. "But this structure provides the best path forward for us to conduct these championships in 2020."

In eight of the last nine years, more than 9,000 pros and amateurs with a handicap of 1.4 or lower entered US Open qualifying. Final qualifying for the 2020 US Open, conducted over 36 holes, had been scheduled to be held at eight US sites, one in Canada, one in Japan and one in England, in May and June.

Recent US Open champions to advance from final qualifying included Lucas Glover in 2009 and New Zealand's Michael Campbell in 2005. The USGA also announced the cancellation of four 2020 amateur championships, bringing the number of cancelled USGA championships to 10 — including the US Senior Open and the US Senior Women's Open.

The US Women's Open, originally scheduled for June 4-7, has been rescheduled for December 10-13 at Champions Golf Club in Houston, Texas. — AFP

Father refused to bribe way into team: Kohli

NEW DELHI: India captain Virat Kohli has told how his late father refused to pay a bribe to get him into a Delhi state junior team when he was a teenager.

The world's top ranked one-day batsman did not identify who had demanded the bribe but said he was rejected by the team, a rebuff that left him "broken".

"In my home state... sometimes things happen that are not fair," the Times of India newspaper and other media quoted Kohli as

saying during an online forum with India's football captain Sunil Chhetri.

"On one occasion, a certain person did not play by the rules for selection criteria," the skipper added. "He told my father while I had the merit, a little extra (bribe) was needed to confirm my selection."

But Kohli said his father had insisted the selection had to be on merit alone.

"My father simply said, 'If you want to select Virat then let it be purely on merit. I will give you nothing extra.'"

Kohli said he was in tears after being told he had not made the team. "I cried a lot. I was broken," he declared. "That incident taught me a lot. I realised that this is how the world is run," he was quoted as saying. "If you want to progress, do something that no one else is doing. If I had to become suc-

Lancashire offer to stage Test cricket during crisis

LONDON: The coronavirus has left the English cricket season in limbo but Lancashire were dealt a devastating personal blow when they lost their chairman, David Hodgkiss. Just weeks later the Manchester-based county have returned record financial results — a fitting legacy for Hodgkiss, who died in late March at the age of 71 after contracting the virus.

And they have put themselves in the frame to host Tests during the English

summer. Lancashire, who chose not to follow other counties in furloughing players during the COVID-19 crisis, have announced their highest-ever annual turnover of £34 million (\$41 million).

EBITDA (earnings before interest, tax, depreciation, and amortization) for the Red Rose county in 2019 were £7.6 million, a 10-fold increase since 2015 and a record for a first-class county. "Excluding minority interests and one-off legacies it is absolutely a record," CEO Daniel Gidney told AFP. "It's a very proud day for the club."

"A hundred percent it is David's legacy. He was a mentor, a friend as well as a boss. With his construction background, without him the £60 million redevelopment (of the ground) would not have happened.

successful, I needed to be extraordinary.

"And I had to achieve this purely through my own effort and hard work."

"My father showed me the right way through his actions and not merely words. Those little things had a great impact on me," Kohli was quoted as saying.

Kohli's father, a lawyer, died when he was 18 and playing in a Ranji Trophy state match for Delhi. He returned to bat the day after his father's death.

"I accepted his death as I was focused on moving forward with my career," Kohli said. "His death made me realise I had to make something of my life. Now I think about how nice it would be if I could have given my father the peaceful retired life he deserved. At times I get emotional thinking about him." — AFP

"The board was the driving force but he was the centre of that. "For me a business problem to solve is like any other problem such as a recession but when you lose a friend it is an emotional kick in the gut."

Gidney said Lancashire, with a Hilton hotel on the site of their Old Trafford ground, were still in a position to host Tests this year. The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) hope they can kick-start a season delayed by coronavirus by rescheduling the three-Test series between England and the West Indies that was meant to take place in June, in July.

Australia and Pakistan are also scheduled to tour England in the coming months. Old Trafford was originally due to host the second Test against Pakistan, which was scheduled to start on August 7. — AFP

Sports

Premier League clubs agree small groups training return

Target return date of June 12 may prove to be too ambitious

LONDON: Premier League clubs will return to training in small groups from today after the latest stage of "Project Restart" was approved on Monday.

Clubs unanimously voted to allow players to start socially distanced training in a bid to resume the season next month.

However, Premier League chief executive Richard Masters admitted a target return date of June 12 may prove to be too ambitious. "June 12 was a staging post; it wasn't a firm commitment and what we don't want to do is continue to move it around," said Masters following a meeting of with the 20 top-flight clubs.

"It really depends on when we can start full contact training and we have a process to go through before we can get to that stage. Of course we've got to be flexible."

Masters confirmed the results from the first round of testing, conducted on Sunday and Monday, would be back by 2pm (1300 GMT) today. Testing will continue regularly throughout the training period.

"Strict medical protocols of the highest standard will ensure everyone returns to training in the safest environment possible," a Premier League statement said.

The training protocols were presented to players and managers last week before being rubber-stamped during Monday's video conference call.

The first step requires training to last for no more than 75 minutes for any single player, and with groups of a maximum of five players in each mini-session.

Players will be asked to leave three parking spaces between their vehicle and any other at the training ground, and arrive wearing kit. There will be no access to communal areas such as canteens or physio rooms.

Newcastle manager Steve Bruce warned on Sunday that his players could "fall down like a pack of cards" with injuries if they are not given enough preparation time to get back up to speed before matches restart.

However, he welcomed the first stage of a return to training.

"I must stress that phase one looks as if it's as safe as it can be. I'm sure everyone will be delighted that we're trying to make that effort," said Bruce.

"In phase one we're allowed to train four to five people on one pitch, so basically a player has a quarter of a pitch to work within, so social distancing is not a problem. We'll train with eight to 10 at a time on two separate pitches."

"Everything is in place in the safety aspect. I've got no issues and I can tell the supporters the players and the staff are as safe as we possibly can be."

'MAKING GOOD PROGRESS'

The resumption of Germany's Bundesliga over the weekend has raised expectations that the Premier League can follow suit. But some Premier League players remain concerned over returning to work while the virus is still uncontained, with Britain one of the countries worst hit by the crisis.

"Phase one is social distancing individual training

that want for fans to go to matches but for many now, the priority is to play. They want to see 22 guys, a ball and a green pitch, the rest will be for afterwards."

For fans, there is an acceptance that the sport returning in muted form is better than it not coming back at all. "We understand that football without fans is not the football we want," says Jose Manuel Mateo, president of Aficionados Unidas, an association of fans from different clubs.

"But given the exceptional nature of the situation, we have no choice but to accept it." "I don't think football can afford just to wait or stand still until there is a vaccine, which guarantees safety," Mateo added.

According to La Liga, playing without fans is not without cost too as clubs surrender considerable sums in matchday revenue. But finishing the remaining 11 rounds of the season and completing European competitions would limit losses to around 303 million euros, a third of the figure contemplated for cancellation.

'WITHOUT FANS IT'S NOT FOOTBALL'

Resumption allows players to return to work and staff too, many of whom have had their wages cut in recent weeks. "Many families also depend on football for income, it's not only the players," Mateo said.

Playing the last eleven days of the league "behind closed doors is a way to save the season," admits Gerardo Tocino, president of the Real

NASCAR stock car series resumed without spectators on Sunday and golf stuck a toe in the water with a made-for-TV charity event featuring Rory McIlroy and Dustin Johnson.

The NBA, along with Major League Baseball, the National Hockey League and Major League Soccer are still formulating plans to return, while the NFL tries to stay on course for an on-schedule season opening in September. "Not only myself and my teammates, the Lakers organization, we want to play," James said. "There's a lot of players that I know personally that want to play. And obviously, we don't ever want to jeopardize the health of any of our players or any of the players' families and so on and so on."

"This is a pandemic that we have no idea — we can't control it," James said. "We're going to listen to the people that's been following this pandemic, following the numbers, following the data." The Lakers own the second-best record in the league behind Eastern Conference leaders the Milwaukee Bucks and were already assured of a spot in the playoffs — which were due to start in April.

Among the uncertainties surrounding an NBA return is whether all of the remaining games of the regular season will be played and whether teams will play in



SAN ANTONIO: File photo shows, LeBron James #6 of the Miami Heat handles the basketball against Kawhi Leonard #2 of the San Antonio Spurs during Game Five of the 2014 NBA Finals between the Miami Heat and San Antonio Spurs at AT&T Center on June 15, 2014 in San Antonio, Texas. —AFP

their home arenas or at sites that will better allow the league to limit access for safety reasons. NBA Commissioner Adam Silver told players last week that he expected the league to study outbreak and testing developments for another two to four weeks before making a decision about resuming competition.

James has said he doesn't relish the idea of playing without fans in attendance, but he said Monday he just wants to be back on court. "You know, I want to get back to playing," James said. "I love to play the game of basketball. I know how inspiring the game of basketball is. I know how inspiring sport is, itself." —AFP



LEICESTER: File photo shows Leicester City's English striker Jamie Vardy (C) celebrates after scoring their first goal during the English Premier League football match between Leicester City and Norwich City, Premier League clubs will return to training in small groups after the latest stage of "Project Restart" was approved on Monday, May 18. —AFP

with a coach. That's no problem, that's like going to the park," Watford captain Troy Deeney told Good Morning Britain.

"I would say 98 per cent (of players) are very much aware that phase one is very good, I would say 65-70 per cent of people are concerned with phase two. I'd say even higher after that."

However, Britain's Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden said he was still hopeful for a return in

mid-June. "I had some very constructive discussions on Thursday with the FA, the EFL (English Football League) and the Premier League," Dowden told Sky News.

"We are working hard with them to try and get it back, aiming for mid-June, but the number one test is public safety. "If we can sort that out then we will look to resume by mid-June. We're making good progress." —AFP

Fans torn as Spanish football prepares to begin recovery

MADRID: La Liga's proposed restart next month has left fans juggling the excitement of football's return and the disappointment it will resume without them.

More than two months after the coronavirus pandemic halted the season in Spain, players have begun training in small groups as they aim to be as ready as possible for the planned reboot on June 12.

Yet goals, saves and tackles will all be greeted by silence or at best, artificial cheers approved by authorities to be pumped out of a sound system. Even for Sevilla against Real Betis, the usually-heart thumping Andalusian derby that encapsulates the importance of supporters more than any other Spanish fixture, the atmosphere will be non-existent on the first weekend back.

But for clubs, there is a financial necessity given La Liga president Javier Tebas has estimated cancelling the season could cost them 1 billion euros (\$1.08 billion).

"People need their dose of football," Adolfo Barbero, a commentator on Movistar, Spain's primary football broadcaster, told AFP. "There is

LeBron eager to get back to basketball

LOS ANGELES: Los Angeles Lakers superstar LeBron James said Monday he's eager for the NBA season to resume, as long as the health of players and their families won't be endangered amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

James, speaking on the "WRTS: After Party" programme on the Uninterrupted multi-media platform, said he hoped the NBA season resumes sooner rather than later. "Definitely not giving up on the season," said James, whose Lakers led the Western Conference when the NBA suspended play on March 11 after Utah Jazz center Rudy Gobert tested positive for the coronavirus.

The virus brought global sport to a virtual standstill, but as lockdowns aimed at preventing its spread have begun to ease, sport has begun to re-emerge. Germany's Bundesliga became the first top European football league to resume after a two-month hiatus at the weekend.

In North America the popular

Havertz stars as Leverkusen thump Bremen

BREMEN: Kai Havertz scored twice as Bayer Leverkusen ended the first round of Bundesliga matches in over two months with a 4-1 win at Werder

Bremen on Monday which moved them within a point of the top four.

The visitors went into the game only four points behind fourth-placed RB Leipzig after their fellow Champions League hopefuls' 1-1 draw with Freiburg on Saturday, when the Bundesliga became the first major league to resume during the coronavirus pandemic.

Attacking midfielder Havertz, reportedly a transfer target for some of Europe's biggest clubs including Liverpool and Barcelona, was the star of the show at an empty Weststadion.

He has scored 12 goals in all competitions this season, having netted 20 times last term. It was Leverkusen's 10th win in 11 games, but their first since winning 3-1 at Rangers in the Europa League last-16 first leg on March 12.

After a slow start to the game in an eery atmosphere similar to the weekend's matches, with all games being played behind closed doors, the encounter burst into life with three goals in five minutes.

The 20-year-old Havertz nodded Leverkusen into a 28th-minute lead, before Bremen right-back Theodor Gebre Selassie levelled on the half-hour mark.

But Havertz restored Leverkusen's advantage three minutes later with another header, from Kerem Demirbay's free-kick. Peter Bosz's side wrapped up a comfortable victory with second-half goals from Mitchell Weiser and Demirbay.

The heavy defeat leaves Bremen stuck in the drop zone, five points adrift off the relegation play-off spot and nine from safety, albeit with a game in hand.

Bremen have spent only one season, the 1980-81 campaign, outside the top flight since the formation of the Bundesliga in 1963. —AFP

Roger Milla, best African footballer of 20th century

CAPE TOWN: When the country's president demanded that a soon-to-turn 38-year-old striker be included in the World Cup squad, it was seen as a new low for African football. The game on the continent had long been dogged by the fatuous interventions of powerful politicians, but messing with selection for the sport's global showpiece event seemed hare-brained in the extreme.

Cameroon President Paul Biya had watched Roger Milla play a charity game a few weeks before and insisted he be included in the squad for the 1990 finals in Italy. Milla was days away from turning 38, earning retirement money playing on the French island of Reunion and long past his heyday, which included competing at the 1982 World Cup, playing in three Africa Cup of Nations finals and scoring more than 100 Ligue 1 goals for Bastia, St Etienne and Montpellier.

"I got a call from the President who said he thought I should play and I was in no position to argue," Milla remembered. Biya's order turned out to be a fortuitous master stroke, even though Milla himself was not sure whether he would cut it.

"I knew that if I got into shape I'd have a chance to make an impact," he said. "When I returned to the national side I got a warm welcome from the younger players. But the older ones had ganged up against me and were not so happy to see me."

Just weeks later, however, that had all changed as the veteran forward captured international imagination, no more so than when wiggling his hips in a provocative assault on the corner flag as he celebrated a goal in Cameroon's unlikely march to the World Cup quarter-finals.

The dance is better remembered than the breakaway goal against Colombia as Cameroon's Indomitable Lions went further at the tournament than any African team had been before, eventually losing to England in extra time in a tense quarter-final.

"We just really wanted to have fun but that we achieved new things for African football made it special," Milla added. In all, he scored four goals at Italia 90 and extended his record as the tournament's oldest goal scorer when he netted one more at the World Cup in the U.S. four years later. By then Milla had become a symbol for a continent, with his exploits after emerging from semi-retirement earning him the accolade as the best African footballer of the 20th century. —Reuters

18 NHL boss Bettman eyes eight or nine sites for 12-team return groups



19 Premier League clubs agree small groups training return



19 LeBron eager to get back to basketball



Celtic crowned champions nine in a row



GLASGOW: (File photo shows Celtic's Scottish midfielder Ryan Christie (L) celebrates scoring the equalising goal with Celtic's French forward Odsonne Edouard during the UEFA Europa League group E football match between Celtic and Lazio at Celtic Park stadium in Glasgow, on October 24, 2019. Celtic's grip on Scottish football remains unbreakable after a ninth consecutive league title was confirmed on May 18, even though they have not kicked a ball for two months. — AFP

LONDON: Celtic's grip on Scottish football remains unbreakable after a ninth consecutive league title was confirmed on Monday even though they have not kicked a ball for two months.

Nine in a row is a landmark staging post in Scottish football. Only twice has it been achieved before, once on either side of the Glasgow divide — by Celtic and Rangers.

But Celtic's feat in matching those historic achievements feels like an anti-climax after the coronavirus lockdown deprived them of the chance to win it on the pitch.

"They are the ones who have lost out the most in terms of the opportunity to play in front of the supporters, going for nine in a row," said Celtic manager Neil Lennon of his players. "I feel so sorry for them."

Scottish league chiefs on Monday declared the season over, drawing a line under a bitter squabble over how to finish the campaign. Rangers failed to gain sufficient support among the other 41 league clubs for an independent inquiry into the controversial vote that allowed the season to be called on a points-per-game basis.

Many clubs were unhappy at the Scottish Professional Football League's insistence that the final instalment of prize money worth £7 million (\$8.5 million) could only be distributed once the leagues were declared over.

But as the shutdown stretched into its third month, there has also been a growing acceptance that the season could not be completed on the pitch.

Celtic were 13 points clear at the top of the table when matches were halted, after storming ahead as Rangers faltered following the winter break.

"We have scored 89 goals, conceded just 19, and established a commanding 13-point lead at the top of the table. We are champions for a reason," Celtic said in a statement.

Rangers fans will claim this title will always come with an asterisk attached. But for the blue half of the Glasgow divide, their focus must now be on stopping

their rivals reaching the holy grail of 10 in a row next season.

Celtic's European Cup-winning side were unstoppable from 1965 to 1974, while Rangers' investment in a stellar cast of stars was rewarded from 1988 to 1997. For all those sides achieved, neither managed a full decade of dominance.

However, doubt remains over when the 2020/2021 season can even start and what the Scottish football landscape will look like. According to UEFA's latest Club Licensing Benchmark report, gate receipts provide 43 percent of revenue for the 12 clubs in the Scottish Premiership, by far the highest proportion in Europe's top 20 leagues.

If a large portion of the season were played behind closed doors, that would hit Scottish clubs particularly hard. Celtic are best set up to be able to ride out the economic storm, with their latest accounts showing cash reserves of £33 million.

Anticlimactic end to season



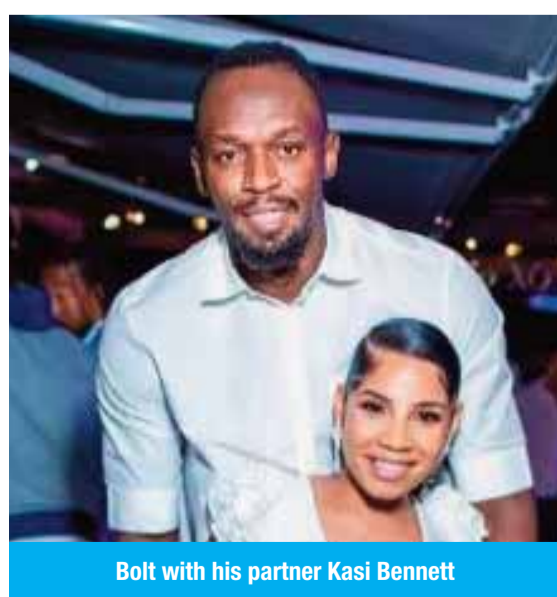
Bolt and partner welcome baby girl

KINGSTON: Jamaica's Olympic sprint legend Usain Bolt has become a father for the first time after welcoming the birth of a baby girl with partner Kasi Bennett, reports said Monday.

Jamaican Prime Minister Andrew Holness appeared to confirm the birth of Bolt's daughter in a social media post. "Congratulations to our sprint legend Usain Bolt and Kasi Bennett on the arrival of their baby girl!" Holness wrote on Twitter.

Local media reports said the couple's daughter was born on Sunday. Bolt, 33, had revealed he was expecting a daughter with Bennett on social media in March, jokingly warning any future suitors to steer clear of his daughter.

"Any man! Any boy! Don't play with me!" the eight-time Olympic gold medalist quipped. Bolt, the world record holder at 100m and 200m, retired from athletics in 2017 after a decade of dominance in men's



Bolt with his partner Kasi Bennett

sprinting. At the 2016 Olympics, Bolt became the only man to win the 100m and 200m titles at three consecutive Olympics. — AFP

French football put health first: Sports minister

PARIS: France was right to end its football season, said the country's sports minister on Monday, casting doubt on the wisdom of restarting the Bundesliga, despite the coronavirus pandemic, at the weekend.

"It was important for me to give primacy to the health and the psychological well-being of athletes over economic considerations, which, indeed, in other countries, have taken precedence," said Roxana Maracineanu on a visit to the French high performance institute (INSEP) on the outskirts of Paris.

While the French league season has been declared over with Paris Saint-Germain champions, the Bundesliga resumed on Saturday, behind closed doors.

"Each country was affected differently" by Covid-19, said Maracineanu, who also pointed to the German federal system in which "the regions make their

Rangers admitted in November to needing £10 million in funding to see them through to the end of the season before the consequences of the pandemic were known.

Aberdeen chairman Dave Cormack has warned his club are burning through £1 million a month and the Dons' turnover from the 2018/19 season was just under £16 million, compared with Celtic's £83 million.

Premiership clubs' desire not to jeopardise a new television contract with Sky that starts next season played a part in ending the season early. However, even an improved deal is reportedly worth just £26 million a season.

"Our middle-ranking Scottish Premiership club might get four times the money through the gate as it does through its TV contract, so the economics (of closed-doors games) don't work in Scotland," Scottish Football Association chairman Rod Petrie told the BBC. Finance experts Begbies Traynor have predicted insolvencies among the hardest-hit clubs as "inevitable". Celtic may be champions again, but there is little else that is business as usual for the Scottish game. — AFP

own decisions, whether it's to reopen schools or resume sport."

While "the stakes are not the same in Germany and France", the minister questioned "the notion of fairness" in the event of the resumption of European competitions, particularly the Champions League, where PSG have reached the last eight and Lyon hold a 1-0 lead over Juventus in a last 16 tie.

"There are some who have chosen to resume their championships, because, without doubt, and I know this from having discussed it with my counterparts from the major European footballing countries, it was economic issues that were at stake," she insisted.

"I think that in the period we are living through, a decision that was guided by a concern for health and the health aspect cannot be called into question," she added. The Ligue 1 decision has caused an outcry among some in football. Lyon's president Jean-Michel Aulas, whose club was out of the European places when play was halted, has launched two legal actions. Maracineanu said the pause could have been an opportunity for sport to reflect. "We could have taken advantage of this moment to ask ourselves questions other than simply 'am I first, second or third?'" — AFP