

# Friday Times

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RAMADAN 29, 1441 AH | FRIDAY, MAY 22, 2020

## Ramadan

KAREEM

Fajr	03:21
Dhuhr	11:45
Asr	15:20
Maghrib	18:37
Isha	20:06

**3** Kuwaiti team develops PCR solution for virus testing



**39** 'Insensitive' Japan Olympic virus logo pulled after row



A handout picture provided by MBC shows Kuwaiti actress Hayat Al-Fahad in a scene from "Um Haroun", which has ignited controversy for promoting what critics call normalization of Arab ties with Israel. - AFP

## Ramadan soaps invite scrutiny of Israel ties

See Pages 20 & 21

## Local

## Back to work



Local Spotlight

By Muna Al-Fuzai

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The days of the comprehensive curfew are close to their end, according to the date that was previously set by the Kuwaiti government - May 30. I think a partial curfew is possible as a preparation for people to return to work gradually, so it is natural for everyone to think about returning to business.

I think the reopening of malls and businesses is an essential step for economic activity to be restored gradually, taking into account security and health protection measures that must be taken in such an exceptional case, especially since the targeted reopening does not target a specific sector but all businesses. I am very supportive of this decision, especially since I have often said that a total curfew will not benefit anyone as long as people do not adhere to health standards for the prevention of the virus.

I think the retail sector, including restaurants, is a priority for people and owners. These days, I have been following several sites that are preparing for a new return soon. I believe that enabling these entities to resume their activities, as long as they take into account the health situation and follow the highest precautionary measures, will help everyone attain a balance between preserving the health of citizens and expats and restarting the economic cycle.

Observing the limit on the number of customers in stores and commercial complexes such as cooperative societies, in addition to commitment to specific working hours, will be a new change, but for the good. I think the same rule will apply to banks and workplaces.

I think that there are important sectors related to people's financial and nutritional needs that cannot be stopped, like auto repair and spare part shops, because people cannot carry out work without a car. Therefore, opening these shops with strict adherence to health standards following the imposition of a law that punishes those who do not wear masks or gloves is needed.

I think that the opening of commercial malls, even with low occupancy rates, will have a positive effect in relieving economic pressure, especially since the shutdown has led to significant losses for companies and employees, as the coronavirus crisis led to a large segment of people losing their jobs, especially in the retail sector, which is very unfortunate, because eternal closure will put the local market in a long-term economic crisis, and this cannot be accepted anywhere.

We must take into account the financial impact on companies whose business is idle, stressing that strengthening the implementation of the plan to reopen businesses in the country requires at the same time measures by business owners, shoppers and workers as well. Among the most important preventive measures is the sterilization of malls daily, obligating shoppers to wear facemasks and gloves, allocating rooms in malls to isolate potential cases and organizing large media awareness campaigns about prevention and protection and the importance of wearing masks and gloves.

I believe that uncertainty about when the coronavirus crisis will end along with the deterioration in oil prices exacerbates damage to the local economy, and we need to move gradually from a full economic closure to a gradual reopening of the economy, which is important, and I hope to see it soon.

Stay safe.

## PHOTO OF THE DAY



SANAA: A boy stands before barrels of raisins at an open-air market in Yemen's capital Sanaa on May 20, 2020, as Muslims shop ahead of the Eid Al-Fitr holiday marking the end of the holy fasting month of Ramadan. — AFP

## It is Eid time



IN MY VIEW

By Abdellatif Sharaa

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There is nothing that matches the joy of Eid after all Muslims have completed a full month of fasting and devotion, and their feeling that they have received Allah's acceptance. The joy of Eid is one of the most beautiful emotions a human being can feel after fasting for 30 days and refraining from doing many things, as most of the time is spent in worship.

The last week of the holy month sees people in markets shopping for new clothes and shoes, particularly for children. Mothers spend many hours preparing special sweets particular to Eid, such as "kaak" and "maamoul", which is made of flour and special spices stuffed with dates and nuts.

Regardless of our age, Eid showers us with happiness, and no matter how many Eids come by, we are always happy to welcome it as if we are children, and memories of the past come to us. Many children stay up all night out of excitement because they want to wear their new clothes and wait for their parents and older relatives to give Eidiya, which is normally money, then go out to enjoy

and have fun.

Women gather in circles while helping each other prepare the sweets. Then on the eve of Eid, they prepare food for breakfast and lunch, as all family members gather in one house, normally the father's, to have their meal. How beautiful it is when grown-up men go to their parents' homes with their children to greet them on the occasion, and their parents are so happy to see their grandchildren in their best, and you can see how satisfied they are in their faces. How great is our Eid!

But hey, Abdellatif! Do not get carried away, as some of my friends say! Mind you, coronavirus is still around the corner, so let us not celebrate the occasion as usual and get infected. Still, we must live the moment one way or another! We should wake up on time on the day of Eid, jump in the shower, pray Fajr and spend time reading the Quran and supplicating until the sun rises, then lead Eid prayers with family members, exchange greetings, eat breakfast, call other family members on social media and create an atmosphere of celebration in the house.

I have never experienced such circumstances in my entire lifetime, even during wars and other drastic events. I pray to Almighty God that this never ever happens again.

Final word: "What is hope but a feeling of optimism. A thought that says things will improve, it won't always be bleak [and] there is a way to rise above the present circumstances." — Wayne W Dyer



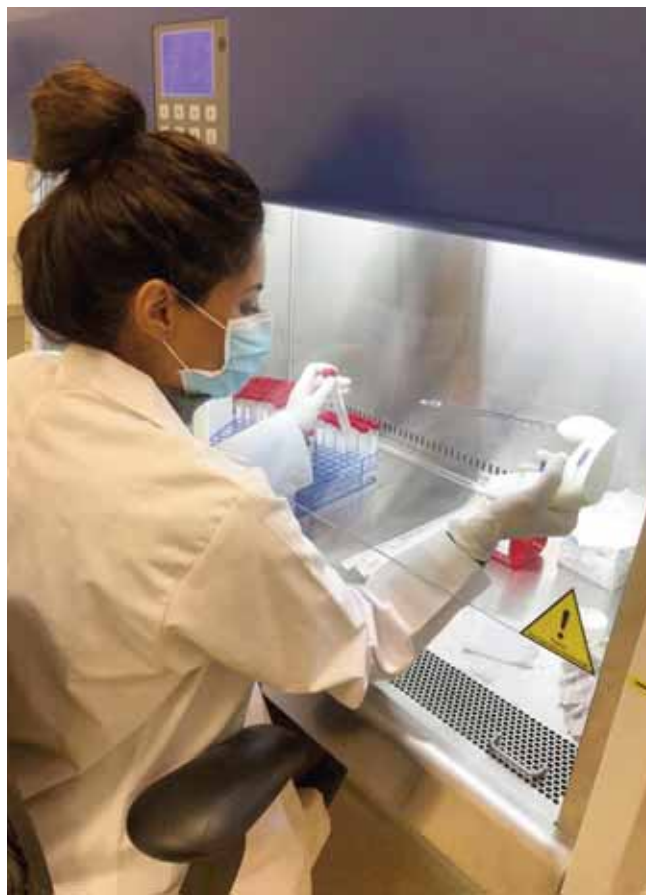
Local

# Kuwaiti team develops PCR solution for COVID-19 testing

## Acceleration of production to honor domestic demands

**KUWAIT:** A Kuwaiti medical team succeeded, in a short time, in developing a Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) solution to be used for coronavirus tests, a surgeon said. This new technique, fully developed by Kuwaitis, has "excellent" diagnostic results which would have a qualitative leap, said Dr Salman Al-Sabah, head of Surgical Department at Jaber Al-Ahmad Hospital. He said the World Health Organization (WHO) considered the PCR test the most accurate against COVID-19, and it required taking a sample of the patient and blend it with a solution called (PCR Kit). "This is what we have developed," he added. Al-Sabah said countries around the world were struggling to obtain this costly solution coupled with specialized companies' inability to honor these countries' needs.

Dr Sulaiman Al-Mazidi, who took part in the development of the solution, said the Ministry of Health formed a team to consider the development of the solution locally. The team, he said, succeeded in creating the solution in a short time. Mazidi said the team started the initial production phase and the next stage would be the acceleration of production to honor domestic demands. The production of this solution, he noted, would save large amounts of money and avoid late deliveries from abroad. The two physicians thanked the MoH and all team members for their hard work and dedication which resulted in the production of the solution. — KUNA





Local

# IN LOCKDOWN, KUWAIT BREATHEES FOR TWO HOURS EVERY DAY







**KUWAIT:** The last ten days of Ramadan is usually one of the busiest times of the year in Kuwait. While the total curfew has rendered Kuwait's outdoors mostly lifeless, the two-hour daily exercise period from 4:30 pm to 6:30 pm still provides an escape for people and their pets, and, even for a brief period during the day, breathes life into Kuwait's streets and neighborhoods. — Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh





## Local

# Carpe control: Ramadan lessons to heal the soul

By Sadie Hussain

As scientists and governments worldwide, debate on how and when to reconvene, there is still immense uncertainty over the future. Some believe that the pandemic may be ushering in a “new normal”; distinguished by widespread economic privation, a rise in contagious illnesses, and pervasive feelings of loss of control. A great deal has already been written regarding the possible psychological complications of the pandemic. However, less has been articulated on taking care of the soul in the midst of this chaos. Psychotherapist Thomas Moore once stated that defining the term “soul” was near impossible and told that it had more to do with “depth, value, relatedness, heart and personal substance”; The realm of the sacred.

Beyond the unsettlement that we have faced in the context of mental health and wellbeing, the pandemic has also unsettled the soul in ways we are only just beginning to understand through some indices.

## Powerlessness

The importance of control has been highlighted so much over the last five decades. The degree to which people believe they are in control has proven to significantly influence individual attitudes toward decision making, resilience and chosen coping strategies.

Taking care of your mental wellbeing, staying physically active and being mindful of what you consume, in terms of food, knowledge and information all contribute in harnessing control. Prayer and meditation has also proven to be effective in “letting go”.

## Grief

Those who have lost loved ones to the pandemic are feeling profound and consuming grief. However, the pandemic may also evoke grief in everyday life, there is a lot to mourn right now. Many are mourn-

ing dead loved ones, the elderly are mourning time lost with their families, those observing Ramadan are mourning the luxuries of family time and iftaar gatherings, people are mourning lost jobs, lost savings, lost security. So many of the pleasures and conveniences of life have disappeared.

On a deeper level, many may be grieving the loss of what was imagined as a relatively safe, stable, and protected life. Comfort may be sought in giving oneself time to come to terms with loss and understanding that one is not alone. This is a global misfortune.

## Loneliness

For those without family, friends or a supportive community, the ensuing sense of loneliness, accompanied by feelings of abandonment are overwhelming. At the very moment when many of us hunger most for the reassurance of company and the solace of community, we're hustled into isolation and particularly so in view of the Ramadan events and congregational practices lost out on this year.

Although digital connectivity and social media has been a savior, it is no substitute for being the physical company of our family, holding hands or the hug of a loved one. Embracing solitude, self-reflection, prayer and meditation help in overcoming seclusion.

## Mistrust

A lack of trust in information, medical treatment and advances has led to countless conspiracy theories. In a US study, up to half of those surveyed endorsed belief in at least one health-related conspiracy theory. During these times, the mistrust that can afflict the soul may prove broader, deeper, and more insidious than in ordinary times. It is the kind of mistrust that can spread, Pandemic-like, all over life.

The vulnerable may wonder: How can I trust that I will have enough food for the next few months? Or that I will be able to get medical care

if I get sick? How can I trust the person next to me, who may be carrying and spreading the virus? How can I trust myself, since I might unknowingly infect my children or spouse? How can I trust that the world is a safe place? Or that I still have control over my life?

Reigning in the questions and practicing mindfulness both help alleviate the soul crushing thoughts.

## Caring for the Soul

Taking care of the spirit, the soul, our sacred temple is now more vital than ever. The five-decade old “locus of control theory” is a valuable model in understanding how individual responses to the Pandemic have resulted in incredibly distinct outcomes. Those with a strong internal locus of control make choices reflecting the belief that their actions play an important role in determining how the pandemic will affect their health and future wellbeing, i.e. maintaining safe social distancing measures, wearing a face mask, and following frequent hygiene practices. In contrast, those with a strong external locus of control do not believe they have control over their future health in face of the pandemic and are less likely to grasp the recommendations aimed at mitigating risk of infection. In simple terms, a strongly held internal locus of control will expectably result in beliefs and behaviors that significantly lessen the risk of becoming infected, spreading the virus or dying.

As the sun sets on Ramadan 1441 AH, May 2020, the profound lessons learned this inimitable year should be taken forward in building the spiritual resilience required to face the road ahead. When fasting from food, Ramadan adherents experience hunger, the point is to feel the hunger, to feel the sacrifice. Hunger is a physical reminder of the suffering of those who have less, evoking gratitude for the simplest things, including health, food, shelter and all the other luxuries that we are surrounded by. This

surrender and suffering for a higher purpose bring observers close to their soul. Most emerge from the month of Ramadan peaceful, spiritual, grateful and more disciplined, a better version of oneself.

The most important virtue of Ramadan, is the abandoning of poor habits and the practice of discipline and integrity. “Pressing pause” in order to make time and space for spirituality and self-reflection, the requirement of mindfulness and the challenges of restraint act as constant reminders of faith and hope, aiding in deep spiritual and personal growth.

This unique Ramadan in lockdown bought the comfort and routine of certain Ramadan rituals. The spiritual purification of the body and the soul may be just the detox and cleanse that we all need from the negativity and darkness that surrounds us all today; And in order to grow through this pandemic together.

In order to grow, one must know thyself and hold himself accountable. We can all learn take lessons from Ramadan in a bid to helping us move forward, ultimately the rewards that we gain are harnessed through actions of our own and not of others. Although we cannot wholly control the circumstances that we are facing, we certainly have the capacity to nurture and care for our souls by shifting our internal narratives in a world that is disturbed in many ways.

By synchronizing our inner-selves with what we exude externally, we can work together in renewing, rebuilding and reconnecting. As we take our first steps in restarting the Kuwaiti economy and rekindling our communities, we will continue to face unknown risks, we will continue to share a deep sense of despair over economic hardship that will likely linger for years to come; In this ‘new normal’, choosing to embrace a narrative of ‘a wholesome soul’ and that of internal control has the power to make a real difference so that when we face the challenges posed on us together, we face them as united.

## Farewell, Ramadan

By Dr Teresa Leshar

Although the hardship of Ramadan is about to end and festivities of Eid are about to begin, there will be sadness in every devout Muslim's heart that Ramadan has passed. Barely having had their last breakfast at sunset, they will immediately start looking forward to the next Ramadan and counting the months and weeks until it comes again. They will begin to greet one another with the phrase “Aasakom min awadah” which means, “May you repeat it.” Some people may tilt their head in confusion and wonder why would anyone look forward to a month of daily 16-hour fasts in 45 degree temperatures? What is so special about Ramadan?

First of all, Ramadan is an opportunity to express your devotion to Allah. Everything on the earth was created for us, according to many verses in the Quran (eg., 2:29). Many use their time and the earth's resources to satisfy themselves through acquiring things, entertaining themselves and seeking sensual pleasures. Doing so is not necessarily forbidden but it shouldn't be the goal of ones' life. So why were we created? Allah gave us life and He hopes that we will voluntarily give it back to him through worship and submission to His will. Almost everything we do in life has some sort of return for us, even if it is done purely for Allah's sake. For example, when we give charity, others benefit and we feel their happiness too. But fasting in Ramadan is a chance to show our devotion to our Lord, because nobody benefits from the fast. Nobody even knows if you are fasting, so this expression of faith is purely for Allah.

Another reason many people are sad to bid

Ramadan farewell is because the atmosphere of intensified worship and charity will pass, and mundane duties and distractions will creep back into our lives. We will miss Ramadan for the brotherhood and sisterhood that is so apparent as Muslims join together in one great project, which is fasting for a month while striving to accomplish the most good and expressing our gratitude and reliance through frequent prayer and supplication. Everyone will miss this immense opportunity to draw closer to Allah.

I will miss Ramadan and all the lessons it teaches me. I have learned so much about myself – about how my body can adjust to extreme circumstances, and about how dedicated I can be when I am striving to accomplish something important. I will miss the feeling of lightness when my stomach is empty and my head is clear – when I am naturally drawn to thoughts of God and His abundant blessings. I will miss the joy of breaking fast, and the cama-

raderie of fellow fasters who gathered for the meal. I will miss the extra attention to the Quran, and joining other worshippers in the night to pray. The moments of Ramadan have slipped away quickly, and the opportunity to demonstrate such devotion in solidarity with all Muslims worldwide has passed.

Farewell, Ramadan, we will miss you. As we start counting the days until your return, stay in our memories and inspire us to carry on with our worship through fasting, reading Quran and praying late at night. Be with us, Ramadan, throughout the coming year.

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

# Kuwait Times

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## Local

# Foreign Minister oversees Kuwaitis' repatriation efforts at Nowaiseeb



**KUWAIT:** Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah oversees the end of repatriation efforts of Kuwaitis in Saudi Arabia, at Al-Nowaiseeb border crossing. — Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh



**KUWAIT:** Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah visited Al-Nowaiseeb border crossing to oversee the end of repatriation efforts of nationals in Saudi Arabia. The endeavor to bring Kuwaitis stranded overseas home has reached its fifth stage. The minister, who heads the work team tasked with the affair, was accompanied by Kuwait Red Crescent Society's chief Dr Hilal Al-Sayer. He also visited Al-Khairan Resort, where he thanked those working on the frontline for their efforts in facilitating the task and ensuring the safety of the nationals returning home. — KUNA



## Oman Sultan congratulates Amir on Eid

**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received a phone call on Wednesday from Sultan of Oman Haitham bin Tariq Al Said who congratulated him on the advent of Eid Al-Fitr. In his call, Sultan Haitham also wished His Highness the Amir everlasting wellbeing and more progress and prosperity for the people of Kuwait. His Highness the Amir thanked Sultan Haitham on the generous initiative which embodies the

deeply-rooted relations between the two Gulf nations. His Highness the Amir wished Sultan Haitham everlasting wellness and more progress and prosperity for the Sultanate of Oman.

In other news, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Wednesday sent a cable to family of deceased Kuwaiti preacher Rashid Al-Haqqan to extend his sincere condolences. His Highness the Amir hailed Haqqan's efforts to promote Islam and prayed to Almighty God to bestow His mercy on the late preacher. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables to Haqqan's family. — KUNA

## Kuwait, Saudi suspend oil from joint field in June

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait and Saudi Arabia will suspend oil production from Khafji oil field and closed affiliated facilities for 30 days starting June 1, following an output cut deal between OPEC and non-OPEC countries, an official said Wednesday. Abdullah Al-Sumaiti, Kuwait Gulf Oil Company's (KGOC) acting CEO, said the joint Executive Committee of Al-Khafji Joint Operations (KJO) decided to suspend production and close facilities.

He said in a statement Kuwait and Saudi Arabia first considered voluntary reduction of 50 percent of production of Al-Khafji joint field. But due to environmental concerns, he said, the two countries decided to suspend the production completely. This decision, said Sumaiti, followed OPEC+ agreement, reached last month, to cut 9.7 million barrels per

day for the months of May and June in an attempt to stop sharp decline in oil prices. OPEC+ agreement, he added, aimed at restoring stability of international oil markets.

Kuwait's Minister of Oil Khaled Al-Fadhel had announced, on April 3, that Kuwait would export the first shipment of Al-Khafji crude oil from the divided zone for the first time since five years ago. Kuwaiti Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah and Saudi Minister of Energy Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman inked, on December 24, an agreement affiliated with the accord for dividing the neutral zone and another one on partitioning the adjacent submerged zone. Dr Fadhel and his Saudi counterpart signed, during the same day, a memorandum of understanding on procedures for resuming the oil production by the two sides.

KGOC, a subsidiary of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC), was founded in 2002 to take charge of Kuwait's share of the crude in the divided zone. It succeeded the Arabian Oil Company, contract of which with Kuwait had expired. It explores for oil, develop and produce the crude in the land section of the divided zone that encompasses fields of South Umm Qadir, Al-Wafra, South Al-Fawares, Al-Hema, Arq, the sea region that includes oil and gas fields in Al-Khafji, Lulu, Al-Hout and Al-Durra. — KUNA



## Local

# Commercial flights to resume gradually in Kuwait, aviation authority confirms

## Ministry denies decision to abolish 'kafeel' system

By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's civil aviation authority said yesterday that they have designed a plan for a gradual resumption of commercial flights as soon as the government gives the green signal. Commercial flights have been suspended at Kuwait Airport for the past several weeks as part of measures to combat the spread of the coronavirus pandemic. But dozens of repatriation flights operated from the airport either to bring back Kuwaitis or to send expats back home.

Spokesman for the Directorate General of Civil Aviation Saad Al-Oteibi told the assembly television yesterday that the plan consists of three phases. Under the first phase, the airport will resume 20-30 percent of its operations which will rise to 60 percent in the second phase. He did not give a definitive timeframe for the resumption but said it should happen "soon". However he added that the final phase will take a long time to complete.

Oteibi said the airport authorities have prepared strict preventive measures that include thermal cameras, social distancing, new arrangements inside aircrafts and also a different setup inside the airport. Travel in post-coronavirus will be different from travel before the pandemic, he said.

The health ministry meanwhile assured the public yesterday that the situation is well under

control and there is no cause for panic from the steep rise in the number of new cases. Spokesman for the ministry Abdullah Al-Sanad said that the rise in cases is within the expected range and because the ministry teams have resorted to intensive testing and active surveillance.

### School year

In the meantime, MP Faisal Al-Kandari said yesterday that he has sent a letter to be debated during the next session and calling to cancel the school year due to fears from the spread of coronavirus among students.

But Education Minister Saud Al-Harbi said after chairing a high level meeting at the ministry that there is no change in the ministry plan to resume study in August for the 12th grade and in late September for other classes to complete the current school year. Several lawmakers have already called on the government to scrap the school year and promote students to the next level over fears of the virus.

Separately, rapporteur of the assembly health and labour committee MP Saadoun Hammad said the committee will be assigned by the national assembly to investigate contracts signed by the health ministry for the coronavirus crisis. He said that there have been allegations that the costs of some contracts were highly exaggerated and the committee will review all the contracts by inviting all concerned authorities.

## First batch of Indians leaves under amnesty

By Sajeev K Peter

**KUWAIT:** The first batch of Indian expats who availed the amnesty offered by the Kuwait government left Kuwait yesterday on a special Jazeera Airways flight to Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh, ending the uncertainty surrounding their repatriation. Two more flights will take off to the Indian cities of Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh and Vijayawada today (Friday) as India's aviation authorities finally gave the green signal to foreign airlines to operate special category flights to Indian airports.

"A total of 145 female passengers, including an infant, left today to the Indian city of Vijayawada in Andhra Pradesh, being the first batch of Indians flying home after availing the amnesty this year," an Indian Embassy official said. The Kuwait government is repatriating

free of charge all those who availed the amnesty to their home countries as part of the amnesty program, in what is termed as an unprecedented initiative by a Gulf country.

More than 7,000 Indian workers remained in shelters for nearly one month, while most of their counterparts from other countries flew home. Countries such as the Philippines, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Egypt allowed the repatriation of most of their nationals who availed the amnesty. Last week, nearly 240 Indians who had been detained in Kuwait's deportation centers for various reasons were repatriated.

The decision, albeit belated, by the Indian government has brought relief to the hapless workers who were hoping to go home ever since they secured the amnesty in mid-April. According to reports, many have health emergencies while others fear contracting the coronavirus amid reports of an alarming rise in the number of cases among expats. Flights to India remain suspended since March 23 over the coronavirus lockdown and the government has made it clear it would not allow commercial flights to operate until it is fully confident that the COVID-19

pandemic is under control. "We are extremely happy - at least they started flights now. We will go home," said Divakar, an Indian worker from Uttar Pradesh who echoed the sentiment of thousands of workers who are waiting for their turn to go home.

The amnesty program for people in the country without residency permits ran till April 30, 2020 and allowed violators to leave Kuwait without paying any fines. According to the Indian Embassy, around 7,000 residency violators have cleared the amnesty papers so far. It is expected that there may be a second phase of an amnesty after May 2020. According to official estimates, there were around 24,400 illegal Indian residents in Kuwait as of Feb 28, 2020.

Meanwhile, the second phase of India's 'Vande Bharat Mission' saw the evacuation of around 550 distressed Indians from Kuwait yesterday. India's flag carrier Air India and its subsidiary Air India Express operated three flights to Kannur, Trivandrum and Hyderabad in this phase - the airlines flew home 879 Indians in the first phase of the evacuation.



**KUWAIT:** Egyptian citizens queue at Kuwait International Airport before boarding a repatriation flight to Cairo on May 5, 2020. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

The State Audit Bureau said last week that government agencies signed contracts worth KD. 312 million since the start of March for the coronavirus crisis, most of them for the health ministry. The Bureau acknowledged that it rejected 11 contracts for the health ministry over inflated prices.

### Kafeel System

In other news, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Social Affairs Abdulaziz Shuaib denied yesterday

that the ministry has any specific plans to abolish the sponsor or 'kafeel' system blamed for creating visa trading in the country.

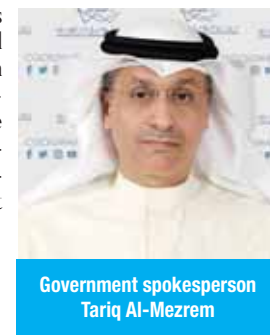
Reports said on Wednesday that Minister of Social Affairs and State Minister for Economic Affairs Mariam Al-Aqeel has already sent the plan to the council of ministers for consideration. But Shuaib said the whole matter is a study on the issue received by the ministry which in turn sent to related government agencies.

## Cabinet reviews alleged corruption

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's cabinet is reviewing media reports of alleged "direct or indirect" transactional links between Kuwait-based companies or government bodies, a Chinese company and the former Malaysian government on an overseas project "marred by suspicions of corruption." His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah is committed to tackling all forms of corruption in compliance with the directives of Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, government spokesperson Tariq Al-Mezrem said. The cabinet was briefed on the recommendations of its Legal Affairs committee regarding the affair, and its implications in line with laws on anti-money laundering and terrorist financing and financial disclosure. It decided to entrust the State Audit Bureau with examining and reviewing the reports to clarify whether there was any embezzlement of public funds or undermining of the interests of any Kuwaiti government body in

these transactions. Also to refer the matter to relevant authorities, in the case the allegations are proven true, to take necessary legal action.

The Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority will also carry out its role, in examining the transactions and determining whether there were any corrupt criminal practices, taking legal action in this case. Also, the Financial Investigation Unit will be tasked with carrying out what it deems necessary to obtain the necessary information from relevant authorities and state bodies to ascertain the presence of money laundering in the transactions, and refer the matter to the Public Prosecution. Furthermore, the cabinet said it attaches great importance to the protection of public funds and is sincerely committed to a fully transparent approach in state body dealings and practices. It explained that its ongoing multi-faceted efforts to confront the COVID-19 health crisis will not distract it from combatting corruption and the misappropriation of public funds. The government will also not hesitate to hold those found responsible for these acts into account. — KUNA



**Government spokesperson  
Tariq Al-Mezrem**





Cyclone Amphan hits  
India and Bangladesh

## Egypt hospitals near 'critical threshold' in coronavirus fight

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SAO PAULO: Employees bury the coffin of a person who died from COVID-19 at the Vila Formosa cemetery, in the outskirts of Sao Paulo, Brazil. — AFP

# WHO reports record virus cases

## More than 106,000 virus cases reported

**WASHINGTON:** The World Health Organization has reported the largest single-day increase in coronavirus cases, as US President Donald Trump proposed hosting world leaders for the annual G7 summit as a sign of "normalization." The WHO said Wednesday that more than 106,000 virus cases had been reported - the most in a single day since the outbreak erupted in the Chinese city of Wuhan in December. The UN body's chief, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said he was "very concerned" about the situation in low- and middle-income nations.

Latin America has seen infections surge in recent days and, in some cases, countries have reinstated lockdown measures that had been eased. Brazil has been hardest hit, logging the third-highest number of cases in the world. Peru, Mexico and Chile have also seen steady increases in infections. Health officials in Brazil reported 1,179 new coronavirus deaths in a single day, although far-right President Jair Bolsonaro remains bitterly opposed to lockdowns, having described them as unnecessary over a "little flu."

With the outbreak in the world's sixth-largest country expected to accelerate until early June, Bolsonaro has refused to accept experts' advice, pressing regional governors to end stay-at-home measures. And like Trump, he has promoted the use of anti-malaria drugs against the virus despite studies showing they have no benefit and could have dangerous side effects. Trump, determined to reignite the troubled US economy ahead of his re-election bid in November, said Wednesday the country was "Transitioning back to Greatness" and announced he could host June's G7 summit at a presidential retreat, instead of holding it as a virtual gathering. "I am considering resched-

uling the G-7, on the same or similar date, in Washington, D.C., at the legendary Camp David," he said on Twitter. "The other members are also beginning their COMEBACK. It would be a great sign to all - normalization!" G7 countries - Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States - take turns organizing the annual summit. French President Emmanuel Macron's office said he would attend if "health conditions allow," while German Chancellor Angela Merkel said she would "wait and see what happens."

### Promising studies

With a global death toll of more than 325,000 and nearly five million people infected, governments around the world are desperately hoping for a vaccine that would allow them to dispense with the lockdowns that have hammered their economies. There was encouraging news on that front Wednesday, as experiments on monkeys offered hope that humans can develop immunity to the virus. Researchers reported progress from one study that looked at a prototype vaccine, and another on whether infection with COVID-19 confers protection against re-exposure. "We demonstrate in rhesus macaques that prototype vaccines protected against SARS-CoV-2 infection and that SARS-CoV-2 infection protected against re-exposure," said senior author Dan Barouch of the Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston.

### Europe hopes to save tourism

Europe appears to be over the initial hump of infections, with the number of new cases and deaths on a steady decline, allowing some lockdowns to be eased. "I haven't seen the sea for two months," said

Helena Prades at a beach in Barcelona. "We just really wanted to hear the sound of the waves." As Spain emerges from one of the world's toughest lockdowns, face masks are mandatory for anyone aged six and over in public where social distancing is not possible. European officials have now turned their attention to trying to save the summer tourism season, which is crucial for the continent's economies. European Union tourism ministers held a virtual meeting on Wednesday as Greece announced plans to restart its travel season. Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said seasonal hotels could reopen from June 15 and international flights would resume from July 1. In Italy, airports were given the green light to reopen from June 3, including for international flights.

### Gradual reopening in Asia

Countries in Asia are also gradually reopening. India said domestic air travel will resume on May 25 after a two-month shutdown, even as the world's second-most populous country reported its biggest daily jump in coronavirus infections, with more than 5,600 new cases in 24 hours. New Zealanders were finally able to go back to the pub on Thursday, but acknowledged that normality was still a way off. "I think we've got to be realistic and say it's going to be pretty rubbish for the next six months," said Kevin McAree, who runs an upmarket winery in Wellington. "People's habits have changed (during lockdown). They're used to maybe having a nice bottle of wine at home and spending a bit more on takeaway food. "But eventually they'll want to get out and enjoy themselves." — AFP



## International

# Libya frontline pullback puts eastern offensive in question

## War draws in outside powers, arms, mercenaries

**TUNIS:** The Libyan National Army (LNA) of eastern military commander Khalifa Haftar said it had pulled back from some Tripoli frontlines on Wednesday, calling into question its ability to sustain a year-long offensive aimed at seizing the capital. The LNA had announced overnight it was withdrawing 2-3 km from all positions in the city as a humanitarian gesture, but its fighters remained at some frontlines in the city. Libya has been split since 2014 between rival factions based in the capital Tripoli and in the east, in a sometimes chaotic war that has drawn in outside powers and a flood of foreign arms and mercenaries. Haftar, the most powerful commander in the east, has tried since last year to capture Tripoli.

The decision to withdraw follows a series of military setbacks that underscore the shifting dynamics of the conflict since Turkey intervened in January to help the UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) stave off Haftar's assault. Turkey's backing is most visible in the new balance of power in the air, with drones striking LNA forces repeatedly and a GNA spokesman saying that six Russian-supplied air defense systems had been destroyed on Wednesday alone.



### LNA backers UAE and Russia call for ceasefire

Backed by the United Arab Emirates, Russia and Egypt, Haftar's LNA still holds all of eastern Libya and much of the south, including most oil facilities, but its presence in the northwest, where Libya's population is concentrated, has come under intense pressure. The GNA last month took a string of small towns linking Tripoli to the Tunisian border. On Monday it took Watiya, the LNA's only airbase near Tripoli and a big strategic prize. On Tuesday it took three small towns to the southwest. On Wednesday morning, there were clashes at Asaba, south of Tripoli, while rockets were striking the LNA's most important stronghold in the region, the town of Tarhouna, an eyewitness said.

Last month GNA Interior Minister Fathi Bashagha said capturing Tarhouna would end Haftar's campaign to seize Tripoli but that the fighting in the capital was the priority. An LNA military source said that in Tripoli the LNA had withdrawn from Salahedin and some other districts. GNA military spokesman Mustafa Majai said its forces were waiting to enter Salahedin but that LNA forces remained in some other districts. Residential areas, hospitals and other civilian infrastructure in Tripoli have been bombarded

to win because the country needs new blood." However ruling party supporter Gertrude, in central Mwaro province, said she would vote for Ndayishimiye "so that he can continue the legacy of our president Pierre Nkurunziza... and beat poverty".

After a campaign marked by violence and arbitrary arrests Rwsa's party slammed pressure on its electoral observers and alleged fraud. Obed Ntakiyiruta, a lawmaker and representative of Rwsa's National Freedom Council (CNL) in southwestern Rumonge province, told AFP his party's electoral agents had been chased out of polling stations. "In some places we saw ballot boxes being stuffed. Elsewhere people aren't allowed to vote privately and are under pressure to vote for the ruling party."

An independent journalist and witnesses confirmed these allegations. Spokesman for the security ministry, Pierre Nkurikiye laid the blame on the opposition and said around 10 members of the CNL had been arrested over "minor" incidents such as "attempted fraud". However as voting stations began closing at 1600 GMT, he said security had been "very good." "No security incident was mentioned in the reports we received and you saw the population voting massively... they voted in calm and serenity," he told AFP. Electoral commission chief Pierre Claver Kazihise said there had been "a strong turnout". Counting has already begun in some stations, and results are expected early next week. —AFP



Vehicles of forces loyal to Libya's UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) are seen outside a checkpoint at Al-Watiya airbase also known as Okba Ibn Nafa airbase, which they seized control of, southwest of the capital Tripoli. — AFP

frequently for months.

### Escalation warning

Addressing the Security Council on Tuesday, the UN's acting Libya envoy warned of a new escalation in the conflict and urged pressure on countries backing the warring sides. However, diplomatic efforts to negotiate a political settlement have made little headway, as more foreign fighters and weapons have poured in despite

months of near stalemate. On Tuesday and Wednesday, Haftar's supporters the UAE and Russia issued separate calls for a ceasefire and political solution. Previous ceasefires have been short lived and the GNA has accused the LNA and its allies of using truces to build up military supplies and prepare for new attacks. At Watiya, the GNA seized what it says is a Russian-made Pantsir air defense system supplied to the LNA by the UAE. — Reuters

## Burundians vote despite outbreak

**BUJUMBURA:** Burundians voted Wednesday in tense elections to replace their long-ruling president, with the opposition crying foul over arrests and intimidation, and little attention paid to the coronavirus pandemic. The election comes after five years of turmoil sparked by President Pierre Nkurunziza's bid for a third term, which unleashed unrest that left at least 1,200 dead and saw 400,000 flee the country.

Burundians waited in long lines, with no social distancing observed, to cast their vote in an election taking place without international observers, while social media such as WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter were cut off. More than five million registered voters are being asked to choose between Nkurunziza's hand-picked heir and frontrunner, 52-year-old general Evariste Ndayishimiye, the main opposition competitor Agathon Rwsa and five other candidates.

Elections are also being held for parliament MPs and local councillors who appoint the members of the Senate. Primary school teacher Patrice, 30, who voted in northern Ngozi, said it was "time for change". "(Nkurunziza) did good and bad things... today I want (Rwsa's) CNL

## Migrant boat crossings to UK surge during virus lockdown

**LONDON:** The number of unaccompanied young migrants crossing the Channel from France to Britain has spiked during the coronavirus outbreak, as travel restrictions force them onto boats rather than trucks. Kent County Council in southeast England, which includes the major port of Dover, was dealing with "230 to 250" young migrants a year ago, its chief executive, Roger Gough, said. "But that number has pretty much doubled. It's now nearly 470 and new arrivals are coming in all the time," he told AFP. Channel crossing attempts have increased since the end of 2018, despite the danger of heavy maritime traffic, strong currents and low water temperatures. In 2019, 2,758 migrants were rescued by the French and British authorities while trying to cross the strait - four times more than in 2018, according to French officials.

The coronavirus pandemic has reinforced

the trend, with the reduced number of trucks going through the Channel Tunnel leading migrants to make the crossing in small boats instead. "We used to see these young people crossing in trucks. This was the typical route," Gough said. "Now what we're seeing is these unaccompanied young people are in the boats." Francois Guennoc, vice-president of the Auberge des Migrants aid group in Calais, said the vast majority of foreign nationals seeking refuge in the region were male, aged 16 to 30.

He said milder weather and calmer seas since the beginning of April may have contributed to the increase in crossing attempts. "The success rate has increased from around 60 to 80 percent, which also attracts migrants to Calais," he said. A police source in Calais said stay-at-home restrictions to curb the coronavirus spread could also have contributed. "With lockdown, beaches were closed and migrants have indirectly taken advantage of the fact that many local people who used to let us know about attempted crossings weren't able to do so," the source added. At least 1,000 migrants have arrived in Britain by small boats since Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced virus lockdown measures on March 23, according to a count by the domestic Press Association news agency. At least 145 arrived on May 8, it added. Of those, 17 were unaccompanied minors. Another three arrived the same weekend, said Gough. Most were Iranians, Iraqis and Afghans. — AFP



## International

# Amnesty urges probe into 'ruthless' killings in Iran

## Israel, Iran leaders trade Twitter blows

**BEIRUT:** Amnesty International has urged the United Nations to launch an inquiry into the killing of protesters by Iranian security forces, six months after they erupted over petrol prices. The demonstrations broke out across Iran on November 15 after the announcement of a shock decision to hike the price of petrol by up to 200 percent.

They turned violent before being put down by security forces amid a near-total internet blackout. Iran has yet to issue an official death toll but has repeatedly dismissed what it has said are exaggerated tolls from hostile Western sources. In a statement, Amnesty said it had evidence that 304 men, women and children were killed by Iran's security forces during the "ruthless" crackdown. The London-based human rights group said 220 of them died within two days, based on its research, including analysis of videos and photographs.

It said the "vast majority" were killed by the security forces whose use of force was "unlawful" as there was "no evidence that people were in possession of firearms or that they posed an imminent threat to life". Amnesty did note an exception, however, when protesters and security forces exchanged fire in one city. It called on the United Nations Human Rights Council to mandate an inquiry into the November crackdown. "Six months later, the devastated families of victims continue their struggle for truth and justice while facing intense harassment and intimidation from the authorities,"

Amnesty's Philip Luther said. "The prevailing impunity afforded to the security forces allows the recurrence of lethal force to crush dissent," he said.

"In the absence of any meaningful prospect for accountability at the national level, we reiterate our call to members of the UN Human Rights Council to mandate an inquiry into the killings, and identify pathways for truth, justice and reparations." Amnesty said that based on its analysis, security forces killed people in 37 cities across eight provinces. It said this reflected the "widespread nature of the crackdown". The poverty-stricken suburbs around Tehran were hardest hit, with 163 killings, followed by the minority-populated provinces of Khuzestan and Kermanshah with 57 and 30, respectively, it said.

Amnesty said it had credible information confirming the deaths of 304 people, including 10 women and 23 children. But it stressed the real death toll was likely to have been higher. "In all but four cases, the victims were shot dead by Iranian security forces - including members of the Revolutionary Guards, paramilitary Basij forces and the police - firing live ammunition, often at the head or torso, indicating that they were shooting to kill," Amnesty said. "The organization is aware of scores of additional cases reported by activists, but assessed that it does not yet have sufficient reliable details."

In another development, Israeli Prime Minister



**TEHRAN:** Iranians wearing face masks against the Covid-19 coronavirus attends Laylat Al-Qadr prayers - one of the holiest nights during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, outside a mosque in the Tehran. — AFP

Benjamin Netanyahu on Wednesday warned arch-foe Iran after supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei tweeted comments accusing Israel of "state terrorism" and calling for "eliminating the Zionist regime". "He should know that any regime that threatens Israel with extermination will find itself in similar danger," Netanyahu wrote on his of-

ficial Twitter feed in Hebrew. He was responding to comments posted on Twitter by Khamenei on Wednesday in Farsi, English and Arabic. "Eliminating the Zionist regime doesn't mean eliminating Jews. We aren't against Jews," Khamenei wrote, explaining that what he meant was to "expel thugs like Netanyahu". — Agencies

## Uproar in Lebanon over hospital army violence video

**BEIRUT:** A video showing Lebanese soldiers striking a doctor inside a hospital in the northern city of Tripoli stirred a social media uproar Wednesday and led to the arrest of the troops. The footage was captured by CCTV late Tuesday after a man was brought to the city's Dar al-Shifaa hospital with a bullet wound following clashes between two families. The video, which spread like bushfire on Lebanese social media, shows one soldier smacking an ER doctor in the face.

Another soldier then shoves him in the back. "Doctors are human saviors and this is how they're protected?," wrote Tamara Rasamny on Instagram, in just one of hundreds of indignant reactions to flood social media. The incident comes as Lebanon's health sector has received praise for its handling of the coronavirus pandemic, which has caused only 26 recorded deaths so far but stretched hospitals to the brink.

Tripoli is an epicenter of the protest movement that erupted against the corruption and impunity of Lebanon's ruling elite last year. The city is also among the regions hardest hit by Lebanon's spiralling economic crisis. The head of the local doctors syndicate, Salim Abi Saleh, condemned the assault, explaining that the physician wanted to treat the patient's haemorrhage before allowing security forces to interrogate him. "This is something we cannot tolerate," he told AFP, condemning what he described as "brutal behaviour that tarnishes the military". The army swiftly announced the arrest of two soldiers in connection with the incident, which it stressed "does not represent the institution". —AFP

## Plight of Filipino maids in Lebanon raises concerns

**AMMAN:** The fate of about 26 Filipino women housed in a crowded shelter under the care of the Philippine Embassy in Beirut has highlighted the plight of foreign workers in Lebanon struggling to return home after losing jobs, human rights groups said. The women, most of whom were employed as domestic workers, have been confined since borders closed in late March to stem the spread of the coronavirus, said Bassam Al Kantar of the National Human Rights Commission of Lebanon.

Coronavirus restrictions coupled with an economic meltdown have led to unemployment and a shortage of foreign currency in Lebanon, with people ditching domestic help or workers fleeing to their embassies as their employers no longer pay them. Human rights groups have raised concerns that the women at the Philippine Embassy, some of whom were working without legal documentation, are being held in over-crowded conditions although embassy staff have repeatedly denied mistreatment. "These women have not seen the light of day for more than 40 days. It's like a place where people are deprived of their freedom," Kantar told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

The Philippine Embassy and Lebanon's foreign affairs department declined to comment but said in an earlier

statement that the allegations "do not depict an accurate description of the condition of the shelter and care given to the Filipinos". In a social media video uploaded by the embassy on May 18 a pregnant shelter resident says "there is plenty of food daily as well as regular medical attention and medicine". Thousands of undocumented foreign workers in Lebanon, mainly from Africa and Asia, are out of work and left stranded by border closures, with many unable to access state services and others subjected to abuse in confinement, according to Amnesty.

Lebanon is home to up to 250,000 foreign workers, some working illegally, who are employed under the country's kafala sponsorship system which binds them to one employer. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have blamed the kafala system and the inability to change jobs, which exists in many parts of the Middle East, for the abuse of migrant workers. After visiting the shelter to investigate complaints about the treatment of the Filipino women, the National Human Rights Commission of Lebanon issued a report asking the embassy to enforce social distancing and requirements for outdoor time.

"We also asked them to ensure that the women have the right to seek help from us or any third party they choose - the right to access lawyers, to access doctors, to access mental health professionals," Kantar said. Dima Haddad at the International Organization of Migration (IOM) in Lebanon, said employers who can no longer afford wages have stopped paying workers, leading to pay dispute tensions. She said the IOM was coordinating with UN agencies, Lebanese authorities and embassies to help stranded migrants. "Even if someone wanted to end their contract what are their options? They can't go back home because of movement restrictions," Haddad said. —Reuters



## International

# Three aid workers killed as S Sudan clashes kill 'many'

## An ongoing cycle of revenge

**JUBA:** South Sudan's UN peacekeeping mission said it was investigating reports that "many people" had died in a surge of intercommunal violence that killed three aid workers and left several missing. Clashes between members of the Murle and Lou Nuer communities broke out over the weekend in the northeastern town of Pieri, where peacekeepers have been interviewing survivors, the UN mission said in a statement. "The team is investigating reports that many people were killed, injured and lost their homes," the statement said, adding that "many" huts were burnt to the ground.

"However, it is difficult to verify the number of casualties given conflicting reports and claims," it said. Moses Majok Gatluak, a member of the Lou Nuer group and former local official in the area, told AFP that 211 people were killed and 300 injured, but that toll could not be independently verified. He said the Murle had attacked Lou Nuer villages. The attack comes after a strike by the Lou

Nuer against the Murle earlier this year - part of a decades-old pendulum swing of violence and revenge by the two cattle-rustling communities.

The fighting often leaves hundreds dead, with one attack in 2009 killing up to 750, according to the UN. "These violent assaults on civilian communities as part of an ongoing cycle of revenge must stop," said David Shearer, the UN's special representative for South Sudan. "While politically motivated conflict has reduced in South Sudan, intercommunal fighting has increased, causing massive suffering for families who are trying to rebuild their lives after the devastation caused by years of civil war," Shearer said.



## Many huts burnt to the ground

South Sudan is emerging from a brutal six-year civil war that left 380,000 dead and millions displaced. President Salva Kiir and Riek Machar, the rebel leader who is now first vice president, reached a deal to form a unity government in February but remain at odds over issues including who will govern the country's 10 internal states. The UN said "some of the violence" in and around Pieri could be attributed to the "vacuum of power" resulting from the deadlock

over local governance.

Three aid workers died in the latest violence in Pieri, including one staff member of Doctors Without Borders (MSF) and "two staff members of another humanitarian organization", the UN's

humanitarian office said in a statement Wednesday. "I condemn in the strongest possible terms the killing of three aid workers in Pieri and call for those responsible to be brought swiftly to justice," said Alain Noudou, the UN's humanitarian coordinator in South Sudan. "The Government, all parties and communities must step up efforts to protect humanitarians who are taking great risks to their safety in order to provide much needed assistance to the most vulnerable people in South Sudan." MSF runs a primary healthcare centre in Pieri, though it announced Tuesday it was suspending medical activities there "until we receive reassurances for the safety of our staff". "We have reasons to believe that the number of wounded people is very high," said Steve MacKay, the charity's deputy head of mission in South Sudan. "So far, we have received 56 people with gunshot wounds, but we fear that many more could be dead, and over 100 wounded in and around Pieri." — AFP

## Egypt hospitals near 'critical threshold' in coronavirus fight

**CAIRO:** Three months after Egypt reported its first novel coronavirus case, medical experts warn the strained healthcare system of the Arab world's most populous nation is nearing a "critical threshold". Hospitals have been hit by a flight of doctors abroad in recent years while the frontline staff left behind face shortages of medical supplies and protective gear that heightens the risk of infection.

The North African country of more than 100 million people has declared more than 13,000 cases and over 600 deaths from COVID-19 - and daily new infections are still on the rise. The country's 17 isolation hospitals reserved for novel coronavirus patients reached their maximum capacity at the start of the month, deputy health minister Ahmed al-Sobki told local press. Since early May, the healthcare sector has indeed been approaching the "critical threshold of its capacity," said Ayman Sabae, a health expert at the non-government Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights.

In recent years, as Egypt was shaken by political turmoil, many medical professionals have moved overseas in search of better opportunities, leaving it with just one physician per 1,000 people, according to the doctor's union. As the virus caseload has mounted, the remaining healthcare workers have born the brunt of the crisis, often at very low pay. "How can I build my life with a monthly salary of 1,800 Egyptian pounds (105 euros)? It's impossible," said Mohamed Ibrahim, a 26-year-old nurse at the Cairo Oncology Center. To get by, Ibrahim works two jobs, also doing shifts in the private sector for a further 4,000 pounds (234 euros) per month.

The World Health Organisation says health care providers account for some 13 percent of total coronavirus infections in Egypt. "We are terrified," said Ibrahim, adding that at least 17 of his colleagues had tested positive for the illness. "Who will help us if we all get infected?" Healthcare workers who show symptoms face difficulties getting tested, said Mona Mina, a member of the doctor's union complaints committee. She said they are often denied the so-called poly-



**CAIRO:** A doctor at the Sheikh Zayed hospital in the Egyptian capital Cairo, shows members of a medical staff, wearing protective gear a patient in the isolated ward for COVID-19 coronavirus patients. — AFP

merase chain reaction (PCR) genetic tests and instead offered cheaper and less effective rapid diagnostic tests.

Another major concern, Mina said, has been a paucity of surgical masks which have been doled out only in dribbles to healthcare providers - a shortfall partially offset by donations from non-government groups. At the same time Cairo has sent tons of masks and other personal protective equipment to several foreign countries in what analysts see as a bid to burnish Egypt's international image. Many, including Mina, have criticized such aid initiatives as "incomprehensible". Egypt this year allocated 1.2 percent of its gross domestic product, or around 4.3 billion euros, to the health system - less than half of the three percent stipulated in the constitution, according to Sabae.

Nonetheless he believes the sector has shown a great "adaptive capacity" amid the crisis. Authorities have opened dozens of test centers and are equipping some 35 hospitals to receive COVID-19 cases. One million tests had been carried out by early May, of which 105,000 were PCR, according to Mohamed Awad Tageddine, health advisor to President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi. Egypt, which was equipped with about 7,000 ventilators before the crisis, has also ordered new units, he said. And Egypt's military, which has recently begun producing face masks, might even set up makeshift hospitals as a last resort, according to the EIPR group.—AFP

## Elderly Koreans lament loss of 'playground'

**SEOUL:** For years, Jeong Nam-poong has found entertainment at daytime discotheques called colatecs that cater to older folks, often losing track of time while dancing the jitterbug under fairy lights and mirror balls. He can't do that anymore. With colatecs mostly shut down after coronavirus infections linked to nightclubs raised fears of a second wave of contagion in South Korea, the 89-year old now sleeps for six hours during the day and plays online Janggi, a Korean version of chess, to kill time.

"I miss dancing," said the retired tool-store owner, who has been living alone since his wife died 19 years ago. "It's so depressing not having anyone to talk to all day. I don't just dance there, I find people to talk to, drink tea, and play Janggi." Eager to bust a move and chat, Jeong and four of his colatec friends met on Tuesday at a Seoul park for the first time since late February. The team - a retired lieutenant colonel, an ex-hotelier, a jitterbug instructor and a housewife - coupled up and boogied to jitterbug music on YouTube, all wearing masks even as sweat dripped down their faces. In a country where the elderly are the most depressed and impoverished among rich nations, colatecs - a portmanteau of "cola" and "discotheque" - offered comfort to hundreds of thousands of seniors such as Jeong.

Entrance fee is just 1,000 won (\$0.82), and a kimchi soup or a soybean-paste soup with a bowl of rice costs only 5,000 won at many, Jeong and his friends said. The number of senior South Koreans is ballooning faster than in any other developed country, but businesses catering to the elderly are some of the hardest hit by the pandemic.

South Korea, which once had the second-highest number of cases behind China, controlled the virus' spread without having to take severe measures such as imposing a national lockdown or forcing businesses to close. It now has about 11,000 cases. But a spike in infections linked to Seoul's Itaewon nightlife district in early May led to shutdowns of discos and bars across the country, after weeks of nearly no new domestic coronavirus cases.—Reuters



## International

# Will pandemic push humans into a healthier relationship with nature?

## Lockdowns are hampering efforts

**ROME:** Daniel Wanjama had everything ready for this year's first seed fair in the Kenyan town of Gilgil, an important event where poor farmers exchange seeds of nutritious, hardy local crops they cannot easily buy in shops or markets. But a week before the fair Wanjama had organized for late March, the government banned gatherings in a bid to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus.

"Farmers who were ready to deliver seeds are stranded with them, and those who were to obtain seeds have not planted (their crops)," he said by email. "This is a serious situation because not planting means not having food," added the founder of Seed Savers Network-Kenya, a social enterprise based in Gilgil, about 120 km north of Nairobi. Wanjama also worries that the cancellation of seed fairs could hasten the demise of resilient crops that may help farmers adapt to worsening wild weather as the planet warms.

A 2019 survey by his organization showed 34 varieties had disappeared over 20 years in Nakuru County alone, as traders spurned local varieties of yam, arrowroot, sorghum and millet in favor of more profitable crops. Now, lockdowns and other measures worldwide to contain the virus are hampering efforts to conserve traditional food crops like those Wanjama wants to save, as well as forests, wetlands and their native species, scientists and environmentalists say.

Green groups and international organizations had billed 2020 as a "super year" for the biodiversity of the planet's plants and animals, as new global agreements were due to be sealed. But

key UN negotiations have been postponed because of the coronavirus pandemic which many environmentalists blame, at least partly, on a failure to protect nature that has facilitated the transition of viruses from animals to humans. Meanwhile, a relaxation of surveillance and monitoring in many countries has led to more poaching and illegal, unregulated fishing, said ecologist Sandra Diaz.

Popular videos of animals taking over empty beaches, parks and public squares may give the impression "we are witnessing some sort of 'resurgence' of nature", but that is not the case, she said. "It is an extremely short truce," said Diaz, a professor at Argentina's National University of Cordoba and co-chair of a landmark science report last year that found human activities risk the extinction of a million animal and plant species. Last month, Diaz and other top scientists behind that report warned of worsening future pandemics due to activities such as deforestation, farming, mining and infrastructure development.

The coronavirus pandemic has now dashed hopes 2020 would see new international accords to halt shocking declines in animal and plant species, including a global framework to safeguard ecosystems under the U.N. Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and a treaty to protect oceans. Key summits to seal those pacts, originally scheduled for the autumn, have been postponed, with new dates yet to be fixed. But Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, the CBD's acting executive secretary, said the pandemic was an "opportunity to reset... our



**ROME:** A homeless man sleeps among his belongings on a public bench on Via del Corso main shopping street on in Rome, as the country's is easing its lockdown aimed at curbing the spread of the COVID-19 infection. —AFP

relationship with nature".

"COVID-19 has...reaffirmed what we already knew - namely, that biodiversity is fundamental for human health," she said in a phone interview. Governments are now recognizing this, she added, pointing to a joint call by mayors of powerful cities for economic recovery to be low-carbon and sustainable, and formal requests from Chile and Germany for scientific help to help avert future pandemics. On Wednesday, the European Commission pledged to protect 30% of the EU's land and sea, cut the use of pesticides by 50% and put a quarter of its farmland under

organic production by 2030.

A two-day Biodiversity Summit to be held at the start of September's U.N. General Assembly will also give the issue a boost, Mrema said. On a personal level, shop closures and restrictions on travel have led many people to reconnect with nature through walks in the park and local countryside, she said. Lauren Baker, programs director for the Global Alliance for the Future of Food, said consumers had also become more aware of the links between the environment and their food as lockdowns led them to cook more at home.—Reuters

## Australian states squabble over reopening borders

**BRISBANE:** A bitter row has broken out between Australian states, with some refusing to reopen domestic borders to outsiders despite a steep drop in coronavirus infections. Several states making up more than three-quarters of the Australian continent shut their doors to compatriots from areas like Sydney and Melbourne in late March and are refusing to reopen them. The debate has highlighted a dilemma set to face the world, as cities, regions or countries emerge from the pandemic at different speeds. Like Germany, the United States or India, Australia's states and territories wield sizable powers. They have largely determined their own COVID-19 responses, sometimes ignoring Canberra's guidance.

While other tourism-reliant countries like Greece and Iceland mull reopening to international visitors within weeks, Australia

is still fiercely debating the benefits of domestic travel. Critics say the restrictions have no medical basis as cases have dwindled, may be unconstitutional and are damaging the economy - making it impossible to fully restart trade and tourism. The issue has also taken on a political tinge in Australia, with officials looking to tap into regional rivalries for political gain and to score points against states run by rival parties.

Queensland Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk - a centre-left leader who faces a tough reelection campaign later this year - has trashed demands from neighboring New South Wales to reopen the shared state border. "We won't be lectured to by the worst-performing state in Australia," she said Thursday, insisting New South Wales must first quash community transmission. New South Wales - which includes

Sydney - accounts for more than 3,000 of Australia's 7,000 confirmed COVID-19 cases and almost half the 100 deaths from the virus.

But new cases in the state are now down to around two a day, prompting centre-right Premier Gladys Berejiklian to call for borders to reopen. "I often joke with the Queensland Premier that I'll end up going to Auckland before I go to Brisbane if we continue the way we are going," she said recently. Yesterday, Berejiklian doubled down, saying it was "not logical at this stage to maintain those border closures for a prolonged period of time" and suggested other leaders were playing politics. "What's really critical to us now as a nation is to get the jobs going, is to stop us falling off an economic cliff in a few months' time," she told public broadcaster ABC.—AFP

## Trump blames Chinese 'incompetence' for 'mass Worldwide killing'

**WASHINGTON:** US President Donald Trump again lashed out at China Wednesday over the coronavirus pandemic, blaming Beijing for "mass Worldwide killing." The early morning tweet, which also referred to an unidentified "wacko in China," was the latest heated rhetoric from the White House, where Trump is making attacks on Beijing a centerpiece of his November reelection bid. "It was the 'incompetence of China', and nothing else, that did this mass Worldwide killing," the president tweeted. The virus first appeared in the Chinese city of Wuhan last December and spread rapidly around the world, killing more than 323,000 people at the latest count, and triggering huge economic damage.

Trump initially played down the seriousness of the threat and said repeatedly that China was addressing the outbreak. He later pivoted to blaming China for allowing the international spread. The White House has also suggested, without offering evidence so far, that the virus originated in a laboratory and was accidentally released.—AFP



## International

# Monkeys develop virus immunity after infection, vaccine: Studies

## Apple, Google launch contact tracing platform

**WASHINGTON:** Two studies on monkeys published on Wednesday offer hope that humans can develop protective immunity to the novel coronavirus. The studies, published in the journal *Science*, looked at a prototype vaccine and whether infection with SARS-CoV-2 provides immunity against re-exposure. Both questions are critical as researchers tackle the virus, which has infected nearly five million people around the world and caused more than 325,000 deaths. The studies were carried out on rhesus macaque monkeys to see whether they develop protective virus immunity from natural infection or from a vaccine.

"The global COVID-19 pandemic has made the development of a vaccine a top biomedical priority, but very little is currently known about protective immunity to the SARS-CoV-2 virus," said senior author Dan Barouch, director of the Center for Virology and Vaccine Research at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston. "In these two studies, we demonstrate in rhesus macaques that prototype vaccines protected against SARS-CoV-2 infection and that SARS-CoV-2 infection protected against re-exposure," Barouch said. In one study carried out by Barouch and other researchers, nine adult rhesus macaque monkeys were infected with the virus.

The monkeys developed COVID-19 symptoms but created protective antibodies and recovered

after a few days. To test their immunity, they were exposed to SARS-CoV-2 again 35 days later for what is called a "re-challenge", and they showed few to no symptoms. The authors of the study cautioned that further research will be needed because of the "important differences" between SARS-CoV-2 infection in monkeys and humans. "Rigorous clinical studies will be required to determine whether SARS-CoV-2 infection effectively protects against SARS-CoV-2 re-exposure in humans," they said.

The second study, involving many of the same researchers and led by Jingyou Yu, involved vaccinating 35 adult macaques with DNA vaccine candidates designed to generate protective antibodies. They were exposed to the coronavirus six weeks later and had developed levels of antibodies in the blood sufficient to neutralize it, the study found. The levels of antibodies, it said, were similar to those seen in

humans recovering from the virus, providing hope that an effective human vaccine can be developed. "Further research will need to address the important questions of the durability of protective immunity and the optimal vaccine platforms for a SARS-CoV-2 vaccine for humans," the authors of the study said.

### Tracing platform

In another development, US tech giants Apple and Google said they were offering health authorities



BEIJING: A woman wearing a face mask as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 coronavirus uses a phone app to scan a code required to prove her health and travel status before being allowed to enter a shopping mall in Beijing. —AFP

around the world their platform for coronavirus contact tracing, a key tool in trying to tame the pandemic. "The work public health officials are doing around the world humbles us all," the two companies said in a statement. "Google and Apple are clear that this is not a panacea but we do believe Exposure Notifications can make a contribution to the broader work of contact tracing," they said. Under the notifications system, someone exposed to a person who tests positive for COVID-19 will receive an alert on their phone.

"Public health authorities will take the lead with this technology, and we will continue to support and advocate for it." They said they would release software updates for health authorities to use to deploy their own apps, developed by their own technical staff. In Europe, most countries are leaning toward use of the Apple-Google platform but France and Britain have opted to develop their own systems, currently being tested. The two US firms said 22 countries had so far asked to use their platform and they expect more to come on board in the coming weeks. —AFP



### Researchers tackle virus

## Bolsonaro bets big on 'right-wing' drug against virus

**RIO DE JANEIRO:** Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro neatly sums up how thoroughly politics has hijacked the debate over using malaria drugs against the new coronavirus: "Right-wingers take chloroquine." The far-right leader made the remark Tuesday, a day before his government recommended widespread use of chloroquine and a less-toxic derivative, hydroxychloroquine, to treat COVID-19 even in mild cases, despite questions about their safety and effectiveness.

The "Tropical Trump," as Bolsonaro has been called, shares his US counterpart's enthusiasm for the two drugs, as well as his tendency to disregard scientific evidence that contradicts him. Based on preliminary studies in China and France - and, apparently, a heavy dose of hope for something other than economically painful lockdowns to contain the pandemic - Trump and Bolsonaro have been touting chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine as potential wonder drugs against COVID-19, despite scientists' insistence that further testing is needed.

Trump even revealed Monday he has been taking hydroxychloroquine daily as a preventive measure. But he has not been able

to do what Bolsonaro has done: get national health authorities to expand the recommended use of the drugs from clinical testing and severe cases to the entire infected population, starting with the onset of symptoms. "There is still no scientific proof, but (chloroquine) is being monitored and used in Brazil and around the world," Bolsonaro tweeted Wednesday. "We are at war. 'Worse than defeat is the shame of never having fought at all,'" he added. "God bless Brazil."

### Side effects including 'death'

With Trump up for re-election in November and Bolsonaro determined to fight what he has called the "hysteria" around the pandemic, the chloroquine debate has turned intensely political. Brazil's former health minister Nelson Teich resigned last week after less than a month on the job, reportedly after clashing with Bolsonaro over the president's insistence on expanding the use of chloroquine against COVID-19. Political analysts predicted Bolsonaro, now on his third health minister of the pandemic, would seek a pliable replacement willing to ignore the lack of scientific evidence on chloroquine.

Indeed, after interim minister Eduardo Pazuello signed off on the new treatment guidelines, Bolsonaro said he planned to keep him in the post "a very long time." The new guidelines recommend doctors in the public health system prescribe either chloroquine or hydroxychloroquine from the onset of symptoms of coronavirus infection, together with the antibiotic azithromycin. Patients will be required to sign a waiver acknowledging they have been informed of potential side effects, including heart and liver dysfunction, retina damage "and even death." —AFP

## Michigan protesters launch 'Operation Haircut'

**LANSING:** After mass rallies featuring armed protesters, those angry over the restrictive anti-virus lockdown in the US state of Michigan launched "Operation Haircut" Wednesday, with barbers using their scissors and clippers outside the state capitol. Several hundred demonstrators - some not wearing face masks or practicing social distancing - lined up in Lansing under sunny skies for a free trim from hairstylists.

Chairs were disinfected after each haircut. It was the fourth major protest against Democratic Governor Gretchen Whitmer's strict stay-at-home orders in a little more than a month. In late April, armed protesters entered the capitol building in Lansing, demanding an easing of the lockdown put in place to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus. Michigan is one of the hardest hit US states, with more than 5,000 deaths linked to the COVID-19, the disease caused by the virus.

It has become a flashpoint in the national conversation about when and how to reopen businesses across the country, to stem the economic pain sparked by the global health crisis. The protest was organized by local conservative groups in support of Karl Manke, a barber who lost his license after opening his salon in early May, defying the lockdown rules. —AFP



## International

# Worried Togo finds itself on the front line of Sahel's jihadist war

## Jihadists, militia groups imposed their own brutal law

**DAPAONG:** In a makeshift bunker of sacks of rice beneath a tree, heavily-armed Togolese soldiers keep watch over villagers coming and going on foot or bike across the border with Burkina Faso. Just a dried-out river bed separates the two West African countries. In surrounding fields, peasant farmers are bent silhouettes, watering the sorghum and maize seeds sown before the arrival of the first rains. Soon, clouds will chase away the fine dust of the harmattan, the desert wind that each year sweeps off the Sahara southwards to the coast and chokes the air.

Nothing dramatic, or so it would seem, ever happens at Yemboate, in Togo's far north. Yet less than 30 kilometers away, over the border in eastern Burkina Faso, jihadists and militia groups have imposed their own brutal law. Those policemen, doctors and teachers who

have not fled are being hunted down and butchered. "When I was small, we spent our time swimming in the river," says farmer Abdoulaye Mossi, leaning on his bike with a hoe, speaking to AFP before the coronavirus pandemic. The arid channel separates his peaceful village of cob huts from a Burkinabe village on the other side.



**Policemen, doctors, teachers are being hunted, butchered**

"Fear rules today," the farmer says. But fear does not stop people crossing between the two countries, especially on Tuesday's market day, when they sell crops and cattle. "They're never far away," he says, of the armed movements. "They often come to have their motorbikes repaired. They will never tell you who the jihadists are, but we know," says Mossi, part of whose family lives in Burkina Faso. The Togolese soldiers mount checkpoints and mobile patrols of the countless cross-border tracks through the bush that enable jihadists on motorbikes to blend into the civilian population.

### Expansion south?

After the fall of Burkinabe president Blaise Compaore in 2014, Togo's northern neighbor fell prey to the jihadist chaos that had begun in neighboring Mali, fanned by the collapse of Libya. Today, jihadists affiliated to Al-

Qaeda and the Islamic State group threaten to pursue their expansion southwards in countries along the Gulf of Guinea coast - Benin, Ghana and Ivory Coast, as well as Togo. A year ago Benin witnessed the kidnapping of two French tourists and the murder of their guide in the Pendjari National Park. In February, jihadists also attacked a police station



A Togolese soldier holding a machine gun keeps watch under a tree surrounded by used tyres as he monitors proceedings at Yemboate, the northern Togo border post with Burkina Faso.—AFP

near the border with Burkina Faso. In Ivory Coast, jihadist gunmen attacked the Grand-Bassam beach resort in 2016, leaving 19 people dead.

Another jihadist group has been holing up in the Comoe national park in northern Ivory Coast for the past eight months after being pursued by Burkinabe troops. The coronavirus pandemic has inspired no ceasefires. In Mali, Niger and

Burkina Faso, the number of clashes and attacks reached unprecedented levels last year. According to local and foreign security sources, many parts of rural Ivory Coast, Togo and Benin have seen the awakening of "sleepers cells" - people indoctrinated and trained to encourage ever more radical preaching in mosques and Koranic schools.—AFP

## In Washington, signs of lockdown fraying

**WASHINGTON:** Rico Montego, 22, is out and about in Washington on his daily routine, chatting with friends on a street corner in the east of the city, despite the strict stay-at-home orders. Compliance with the lockdown - now in its eighth week - has been patchy across the American capital, with concern focused on casual social gatherings in neighborhoods hardest hit by the coronavirus pandemic. Montego lives in Trinidad, a small, ethnically-mixed residential area that has recorded over 230 cases of coronavirus, among the highest per capita in the city. According to official data, 77 percent of the 407 deaths in Washington have been black, revealing the disproportionate toll on African-Americans as only about 46 percent of residents are black. "It is very difficult to stay home all day with nothing to do," said Montego.

"I was working for a big security company until they stopped our shifts. They say we will go back, but I have no money coming in. I haven't got my stimulus check - the system is all backed up. We are just waiting around." A few blocks away, Barry Wright, 61, and about eight other men gathered on a sidewalk to eat lunch distributed by a local school. "We are here every day. We all grew up nearby," he said. The group are theoretically breaking the city's lockdown rules, and could face \$5,000 fines or even 90 days in jail, but Wright said the police don't interfere. "They know us and stop to chat, asking us if we're OK and giving us water bottles," he said.—AFP

## After weeks on front lines, Alabama nurse returns re-energized

**NEW YORK:** Seven weeks ago Dianne King left her Alabama home to fight COVID-19 in hard-hit New York, traveling to a city she'd never seen to battle a virus killing hundreds of people per day. And after a grueling schedule on the front lines in America's most populous city, the 43-year-old nurse is returning home this week with renewed motivation for her work. Fighting back tears, King described "the appreciation that we have felt as nurses" as the coronavirus pandemic raged. "For the first time, I can say in my whole career, from the patients, from families, from management, from random people on the street... did stop to say thank you," she said. "It makes you feel like you're really doing something great." A specialist in cardiac intensive care, King arrived in New York on April 3, when residents were being admitted to hospitals in the thousands. She, like thousands of nurses nationwide, was driven to help as dramatic images of a city in despair circulated.

King also earned well above what she would have made in the same amount of time at her hospital in Alabama. In New York she met Grace Morales and Carla Cooley, also nurses from the US south. The three colleagues were housed in hotels in the business district Midtown, emptied by the crisis. The work was intense: 12-hour night shifts for 21 consecutive days, before two days off - then a new cycle began. They were all assigned to the Roosevelt Island Medical Center, normally a chronic care facility that was converted overnight into a hospital treating patients struck by COVID-19.

Emergency rooms from the city's general hospitals sent overflow patients who were not in critical condition there. "I think the thing that shocked me the

most is the amount of patients we were getting," she told AFP. "One right after another, they were just literally lined up." Like all health workers, she was not always able to help as much as she wished to: among the hardest moments was when one of her patients learned that her sister had died of COVID-19. "That was a really tough time, it was really an emotional time," King said. "You know, I just held her arm, hold her hand." "It was hard, I didn't really know what to say except for that I'm here and I'm so sorry."

### Renewed spark

But despite struggles at the hospital under-prepared for the challenge, King said she felt more useful than ever. It's a sentiment shared by her new friends: "When we go back, we will be proud of what we have done," said Morales, who plans to return to Texas in two weeks. King explained she began nursing at 13, taking care of an elderly woman near her home. "That's all I've ever wanted to be, that's all I've ever done. But then the day in and day out of it you get into a rut and you don't feel appreciated - your co-workers lift you up, and you love working with them," she said. But between struggles from management to long hours, "you kind of lose a little bit of that spark," King said. "And then when you come here and you get this, it just re-energizes you." With the death rate and number of hospitalizations declining in New York, King's mission has ended. The mother of three young adults was due to board a Birmingham-bound plane Wednesday evening, and will use her obligatory quarantine after returning to relax and reflect on next career steps. Prior to her departure she took advantage of her last hours in the famous city she previously never had the chance to visit.

King had used her only two days off to walk for hours on the deserted streets of the normally bustling city, visiting Manhattan's top tourist sites like Central Park and the Empire State Building. "It was like I got my own private tour of New York, because nobody was out and it was just desolate," she said. Along with re-discovering her inspiration, King will return home with "lifelong friends" and the itch for another trip. "I've got the bug - I'm ready to travel," she said. "And I've taken care of patients that needed to be taken care of." "Who can ask for anything more than that, doing what we do?"—AFP



## International

# Social distancing ditched as Cyclone Amphan batters India and Bangladesh

## At least 650,000 people flee to evacuation shelters

**MIDNAPORE:** Social distancing was futile for one frightened group of people fleeing Cyclone Amphan, who herded cows and chickens to a packed Indian evacuation bunker on Wednesday despite fears of coronavirus infection. The shelter, west of Kolkata in Midnapore district, opened just before the strongest storm in decades collided into the nearby coast packing winds of up to 190 kilometers per hour (118 mph). Twenty people were cramped in one small room and only two were wearing facemasks, even though authorities had pledged to reduce crowding in shelters and make the wearing of protective gear compulsory.

"I don't think I have a mask," said Kavita Lahiri, who brought her three children to the concrete building but had to leave her two cows tethered outside. Amphan is set to cut a devastating path through eastern India and neighbouring Bangladesh at a time when both countries are struggling to contain coronavirus outbreaks. At least 650,000 people fled to evacuation shelters in India's West Bengal and Odisha states and an estimated 2.4 million were relocated on other side of the border ahead of the cyclone's landfall.

Authorities fear that migrant workers who recently returned from major cities could be carrying the virus to impoverished rural districts around the Bay of Bengal that now lie in the storm's path. "Cyclone Amphan is the perfect example of how interconnected our crises are - with the poor having to cram into crowded cyclone shelters and put them-

selves at risk of catching the virus," said leading Bangladesh social activist Risalat Khan. The West Bengal government said it had sent masks and sanitizer to evacuation centers, but at most shelters there was little sign of protective equipment.

Across the border in Bangladesh's Khulna district, more than 200 anxious villagers packed the Momtaj Begum school. "We are worried because of the cyclone and the coronavirus," said 25-year-old Rumki Khatun as she cradled her infant son. "The room is already packed and maintaining social distancing is impossible here. Only Allah can save us." Bangladesh's junior disaster management minister Enamur Rahman told AFP that Bangladesh had tripled its number of evacuation shelters to nearly 15,000 to help social distancing. "People have been asked to wear masks. We have also made provision for soap and sanitizer," he added.

But many others in the storm's path said they would not leave their homes out of fear of catching the virus. "We heard that the cyclone shelter near the police station is crammed with people," said Sulata Munda, a mother of four in nearby Shyamnagar district. Her family and neighbors had all stayed behind as well. "The village guard told us to leave. We fear the cyclone, but we also fear the coronavirus. Many of us did not go," she said. The virus has claimed more than 3,000 lives in India and nearly 400 others in Bangladesh, according to official figures. Experts say the low level of testing in both countries means the true toll is likely higher.—AFP



SATKHIRA: A man checks cars in a garage damaged by cyclone Amphan in Satkhira. — AFP

## Mobsters pocket income support

**ROME:** More than 100 Italian mobsters have embezzled income support destined for the nation's poorest, including the son of a mafioso nicknamed "the Italian Pablo Escobar," police said Wednesday. All 101 belonged to the powerful 'Ndrangheta in Calabria and included wealthy gangsters with close ties to bosses or with key roles within the organized crime group, a statement said. Alessandro Pannunzi, the son of a man dubbed Italy's version of Colombian drug lord Escobar, was among those cashing in. His father Roberto was "unanimously considered by Italian and American investigators to be one of the world's most important cocaine brokers, and who boasted that he did not count his money, but weighed it", police said.

Alessandro's wife is the daughter of "one of the main Colombian cocaine producers," it added. Each of those nabbed will have to pay back their share of the 516,000 euros

(\$566,000) stolen from the state. The mobsters had submitted claims under false identities, Italian media reports said, and police were investigating whether those tasked with inspecting them may have had ties to the criminal underworld. The poverty relief scheme known as the "citizens' income" is aimed at the five million Italians living below the poverty line.

The 'Ndrangheta, which takes its name from the ancient Greek word for "courage", is generally believed to have outgrown its Sicilian and Neapolitan competitors thanks to cocaine trafficking from Latin America. Its stronghold is Calabria in Italy's south, but it has become increasingly powerful in northern Italy and abroad too. Mafia experts say it is the only organized crime group present on every continent. The income support sting came as warnings abounded in Italy over risks the mafia could flourish during the deep economic recession caused by over two months of an economically-devastating national lockdown. Experts warn usury is already on the rise and crime groups will also be looking to feast on public aid for suffering businesses.—AFP

## Scientists spot an alien planet as it is being formed

**WASHINGTON:** Astronomers have gazed into what appears to be a planetary maternity ward, observing for the first time within a huge disk of dense gas and dust surrounding a newly formed star a planet in the process of being born. This large young planet is forming around a star called AB Aurigae that is about 2.4 times the mass of the sun and located in our Milky Way galaxy 520 light years from Earth, researchers said on Wednesday. A light year is the distance light travels in a year, 5.9 trillion miles (9.5 trillion km).

The scientists used the European Southern Observatory's Very Large Telescope in Chile to spot a spiral structure within the swirling disk around AB Aurigae generated

by the presence of a planet. They detected a "twist" pattern of gas and dust in the spiral structure marking where the planet was coalescing. "It takes several million years for a planet to be in its final stage, so birth is not well defined in time. However, we can say that we were likely able to catch a planet in the process of formation," said Observatoire de Paris astronomer Anthony Boccaletti, who led the research published in the journal *Astronomy & Astrophysics*.

More than 4,000 planets have been discovered orbiting stars beyond our solar system. Scientists are eager to learn more about how they are born as cold gas and dust consolidate in these disks surrounding new stars. The planet is located about 30 times further from its star than Earth's distance from the sun - about the distance of the planet Neptune in our solar system, Boccaletti said. It appears to be a large gas planet, not a rocky planet like Earth or Mars, and may be more massive than our solar system's largest planet Jupiter, Boccaletti added.—Reuters



## International

# Antibody study shows long road to immunity; death toll mounts

## Sweden harder hit by pandemic than Nordic neighbors

**STOCKHOLM:** A Swedish study found that just 7.3 percent of Stockholmers developed COVID-19 antibodies by late April, which could fuel concern that a decision not to lock down Sweden against the pandemic may bring little herd immunity in the near future. The strategy was championed by Chief Epidemiologist Anders Tegnell, whose recommendation for voluntary measures against the virus, rather than a mandatory lockdown like those imposed by many other countries, has divided opinion at home and abroad.

Sweden's strategy of keeping most schools, restaurants, bars and businesses open even as much of Europe hunkered down behind closed doors exposed it to criticism with death rates running far higher than in Nordic neighbors, even if much lower than in countries

such as Britain, Italy and France that shut down. The number of COVID-19 patients in intensive care in Sweden has fallen by a third from the peak in late April and health authorities say the outbreak is slowing. However, Sweden has recorded the highest number of COVID-19 deaths per capita in Europe over the last seven days.

The antibody study sought to look into the potential for herd immunity, a situation where enough people in a population have developed immunity to an infection to be able to effectively stop that disease from spreading. The findings were roughly in line with models predicting a third of the Swedish capital's population would have had the virus by now and where at least

limited herd immunity could have set in, the Swedish Health Agency said on Wednesday.

"It is a little bit lower (than expected) but not remarkably lower, maybe one or a couple of percent," Tegnell told a Stockholm news conference. "It squares pretty well with the models we have." However, the herd immunity concept is untested for the novel coronavirus and the extent and duration of immunity among recovered patients is equally uncertain as well. The study drew on some 1,100 tests from across the country although only figures for Stockholm were released.

While Health Agency officials have stressed herd immunity is not a goal in itself, it has also said the strategy is only to slow the virus enough for health services to cope, not suppress it altogether. They have said that countries employing wholesale

lockdowns to prevent any exposure to the coronavirus could face renewed outbreaks as restrictions were eased and be more susceptible to any second wave of the disease. The World Health Organization has warned against pinning hopes on herd immunity. It said last week global studies had found antibodies in only 1-10 percent of the population, results in line with recent findings in Spain and France.

### 'Herd immunity'

Bjorn Olsen, Professor of Infectious Medicine at Uppsala University, is among dozen academics who have criticized Sweden's pandemic response and labeled herd immunity a "dangerous

Swedish authorities avoid mandatory lockdown



A healthcare worker cleans and disinfects an ambulance after dropping a patient at the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) at Danderyd Hospital near Stockholm during the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic. —AFP

and unrealistic" approach to dealing with COVID-19. "I think herd immunity is a long way off, if we ever reach it," he told Reuters after the release of the antibody findings.

Sweden's approach, shaped by a conviction the coronavirus can be slowed but not fully suppressed, is reflected not just in an aversion to quarantines and closures but in a decision to carry out relatively little testing and contact tracing. Tests are largely restricted to hospitalized cases and health care workers. Weekly test numbers still run at less than a third of the government's goal of 100,000, a far lower per capita rate than Sweden's Nordic peers and below that of most West European countries. Meanwhile the death toll has continued to rise, compounded

by a failure to protect the old and infirm in a country famed for its welfare state.

Helen Gluckman, 55, wept bitterly as she related how her 83-year-old father died of a COVID-19 infection contracted in a nursing home after untested patients were admitted there. "We don't know what will happen when other countries open up, but right now one can't help but think Sweden has really failed. There are more than 3,000 dead now. That is a horrible number." With cases having crossed the 30,000 mark, Sweden's death toll in the pandemic has reached 3,831, more than three times the combined total of Denmark, Norway, Finland and Iceland, all nations with similar welfare systems and demographics. — Reuters

## US births hit 35-year low

**WASHINGTON:** US births hit a 35-year low last year, US officials announced Wednesday, part of an ongoing "baby bust" that is not predicted to get better under the coronavirus pandemic. Mothers gave birth to some 3.75 million babies in 2019, down one percent from the previous year and the lowest number since 1985, according to the National Center for Health Statistics. The US birth rate has mostly declined since the 2007-2009 global economic downturn, with millennials forming families at slower rates than their predecessors.

Economists indicate that periods of economic decline give couples pause before planning to procreate. With more than 30 million US jobs destroyed at least temporarily amid shutdowns due to the coro-

navirus pandemic, millennials, a generation that came of age during the Great Recession and that is now at peak childbearing age, may be putting off starting or expanding a family. According to the report, birth rates in 2019 declined for almost all age groups of women under 35 but rose for those in their early 40s.

The birth rate for teenagers aged 15-19, meanwhile, declined by five percent. The falling birth rate is opposite of what occurred in the years following World War II, a period of time when the United States enjoyed considerable prosperity. Those returning from war gave birth to an uptick in infants who became known as the "baby boomers," a term used to describe people born between up to the mid-1960s. The new figures out Wednesday represented the fifth year since 2014 that US births have declined. The data also showed that the total fertility rate, or number of births a typical woman would have over her lifetime, fell to 1.7. —AFP

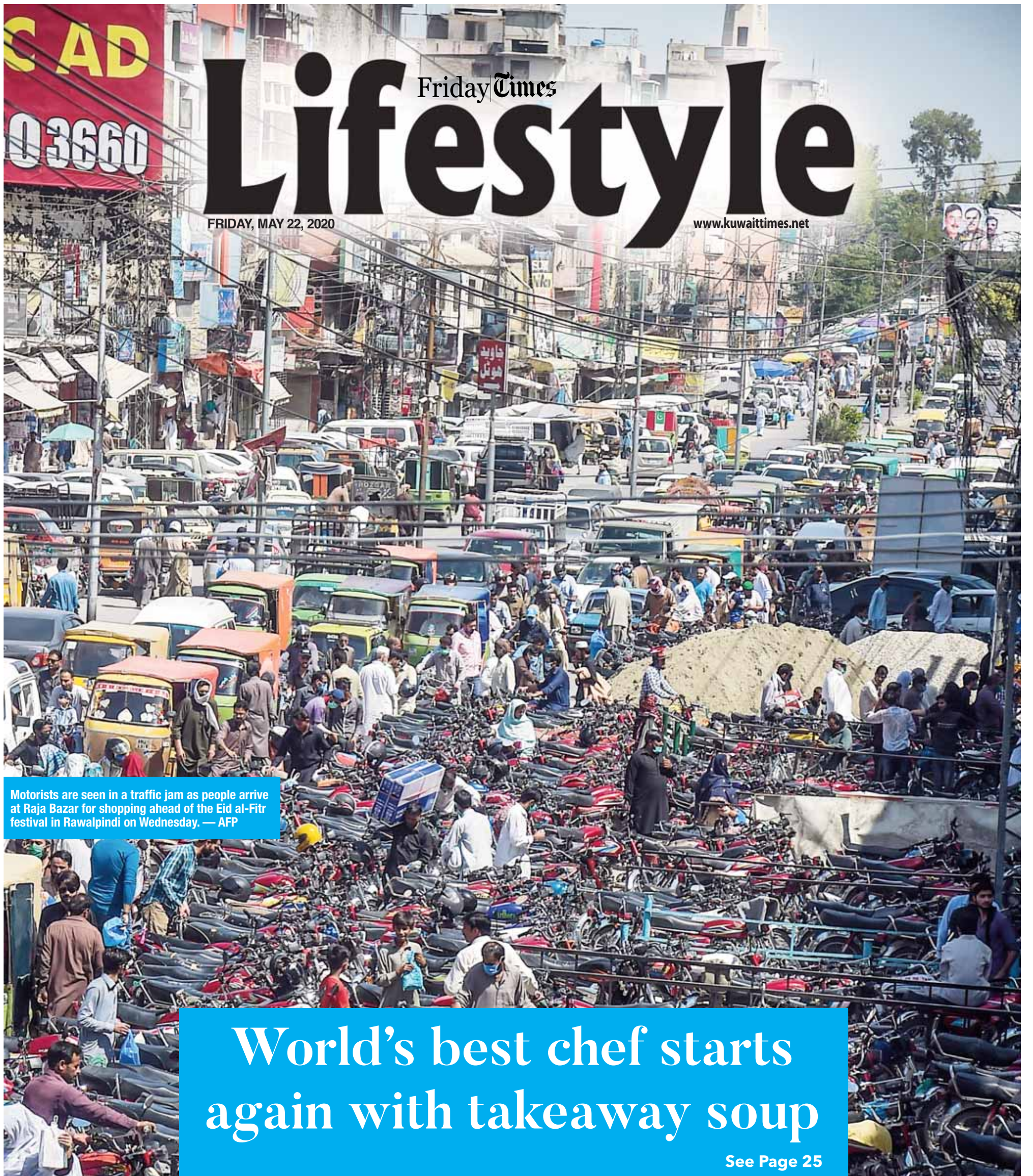
## Japan newborn gets liver stem cells in world first

**TOKYO:** Doctors in Japan have successfully transplanted liver cells derived from embryonic stem cells into a newborn baby, in a world first that could provide new treatment options for infants. The newborn was suffering from urea cycle disorder, where the liver is not capable of breaking down toxic ammonia. But the six-day-old was too small to undergo a liver transplant, generally not considered safe until a child weighs around six kilograms (13 pounds) at around three to five months old. Doctors at the National Center for Child Health and Development decided to try a "bridge treatment" until the baby was big enough, injecting 190 million liver cells derived from embryonic stem cells (ES cells) into the blood vessels of the baby's liver.

Following the treatment, "the patient did not see an increase in blood ammonia concentration and was able to successfully complete the next treatment", namely a liver transplant, the institute said in a press release. The baby, whose sex has not been disclosed, received a liver transplant from its father and was discharged from the hospital six months after birth. "The success of this trial demonstrates safety in the world's first clinical trial using human ES cells for patients with liver disease," the institute said. It noted that in Europe and the United States, liver cells are often available after being removed from brain-dead donors, but the supply in Japan is more limited.

That has created difficulties in managing the health of small children as they wait to grow big enough for liver transplants. ES cells are harvested from fertilized eggs and using them in research has raised ethical issues because embryos are destroyed subsequently. The national institute is one of two organizations in Japan allowed to establish ES cells to study new medical treatments. It works with fertilized eggs whose use has been approved by both donors having already completed fertility treatment, according to the institute. — AFP





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Friday Times

# Lifestyle

FRIDAY, MAY 22, 2020

www.kuwaittimes.net

Motorists are seen in a traffic jam as people arrive at Raja Bazar for shopping ahead of the Eid al-Fitr festival in Rawalpindi on Wednesday. — AFP

World's best chef starts again with takeaway soup

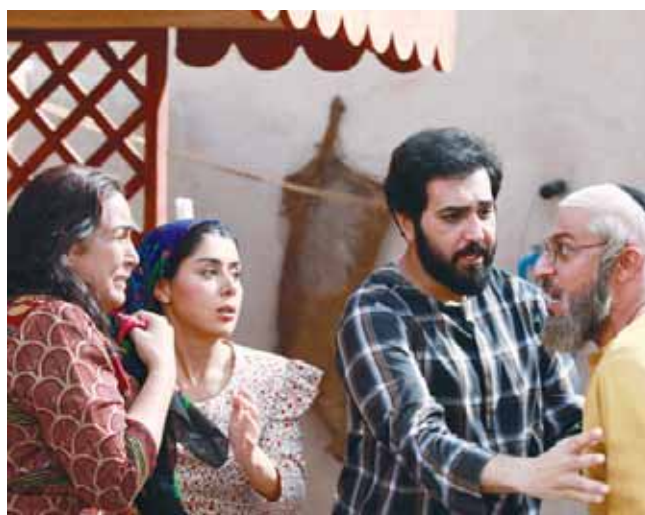
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# Saudi Ramadan TV dramas invite scrutiny of Israel ties



Handout pictures provided by the Middle East Broadcasting Center (MBC) and dated Jan 3, 2020 show scenes from “Um Haroun”, a Saudi-made television series aired during Ramadan, which has ignited controversy for promoting what critics call normalization of Arab ties with Israel. —AFP photos



Two Ramadan television dramas on a Saudi-controlled network have stirred controversy as they test public perceptions of quietly warming relations between the Gulf kingdom and Israel. Arab states including Saudi Arabia have no official diplomatic ties with Israel, but both sides are pursuing what one think tank calls a “tepid dance” to furtively build relations on the basis of shared animosity towards Iran.

Now, two taboo-busting series during the holy fasting month - the peak television season - have fuelled speculation that Riyadh is trying to openly normalize closer ties with the Jewish state. A young character in “Exit 7”, which depicts the journey of a middle-class family through a rapidly modernizing Saudi Arabia, raised eyebrows when he befriended an Israeli boy through an online video game.

In another controversial scene, one of the Saudi characters justifies establishing trade ties with Israel, arguing that Palestinians are the real “enemy” for insulting the kingdom “day and night” despite decades of financial support. Another show called “Umm Haroun”, or the mother of Haroun, portrays a Jewish community in a village in Kuwait during the 1940s. Social media imploded with scathing criticism of the shows, with multiple Twitter users saying their aim was to promote “normalization with Israel”.

The shows are produced by the influential Arab satellite network MBC, effectively under Saudi government control after its founder - media mogul Waleed Al-Ibrahim - was detained with other elite businessmen at Riyadh’s Ritz-Carlton hotel in a 2017 anti-corruption campaign. They stand in contrast to “The End”, a popular Egyptian sci-fi drama that provoked fury in Israel after it predicted the collapse of the Jewish state.

MBC said its shows were among the most popular during Ramadan, garnering top ratings. “The Middle East has been stereotyped for decades as a region of fear, bloodshed, hatred, extremism,” MBC spokesman Mazen Hayek told AFP. “The shows have sought to project another image of the region that embodies hope, tolerance, inter-religious dialogue. The accusation of ‘normalization’ is a bit outdated in the context of globalization and hyper connectivity.”

## ‘Gauging tool’

Observers, however, say the shows may be an attempt to normalize the debate on normalization. “These shows are useful for the Saudi state to understand where people stand on Israel and Palestine,” said Aziz Alghashian, a lecturer at Essex University specializing in the kingdom’s foreign policy towards Israel. “These shows function as a gauging tool and feel out peoples’ reactions.”

This is hardly the first such attempt. Earlier this year, the kingdom announced the screening of a Holocaust-themed film for the first time at a movie festival, before it was cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic. Multiple Saudi media columnists have shrugged off the MBC controversy, reiterating the kingdom’s official stance that a settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a precondition for normalizing ties.

But relations appear to be warming regardless, in a shift spearheaded by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. The cooperation saw Riyadh welcome US President Donald





Handout pictures provided by MBC and dated March 1, 2020 show scenes from "Exit-7", a Saudi-made television series aired during Ramadan.

Trump's Middle East peace plan - skewed in favor of Israel - even as many others in the Arab world rejected it. Saudi Arabia quietly opened its airspace in 2018 for the first time for an Israel-bound passenger plane.

Other Gulf states appear to be adopting a similar approach, with Oman hosting Netanyahu in Oct 2018 in the first visit of its kind in more than two decades. The United Arab Emirates flew its first publicly announced flight to Israel on Tuesday when Etihad Airways transported medical supplies to Palestinians.

**'Revolutionary moment'**

A surge in tensions between Tehran and Riyadh and Saudi

attempts to attract foreign investment to fund its ambitious Vision 2030 economic reforms appear to be pushing the kingdom closer to Israel than ever. "The Saudis recognize the important role that Israel plays in the region," said Marc Schneier, an American rabbi with close ties to the kingdom and the Gulf.

"Just a couple of years ago, (Prince) Khalid bin Salman told me that the kingdom knows that Israel is an integral part of their achieving their 2030 economic plan. That is a major statement and really shows the warming of the ties," Schneier told AFP. Saudi authorities did not respond to a request for comment and an interview with Prince Khalid, the younger brother of the crown prince.

In recent years, Saudi Arabia has pursued a bold outreach to Jewish figures, but the kingdom appears wary of a public backlash. In February, the Saudi king hosted a Jerusalem-based rabbi in Riyadh for the first time in modern history. Israeli media published a photograph of rabbi David Rosen with Saudi King Salman, hailing it as a "revolutionary moment". But the official Saudi Press Agency omitted Rosen's name from its dispatch and the photograph published on its website cropped out the rabbi.

"This is a region of the world where change like this takes time," said Schneier. "We are seeing evolutionary signs of a warming, but it may take longer before we see more dramatic diplomatic moves." —AFP





# Syrians turn to flea markets

## for frugal Eid al-Fitr feast



A Syrian man waits for customers at a second-hand clothes shop at a flea market in the capital Damascus on May 17, 2020, amid a severe economic crisis that has been compounded by a coronavirus lockdown. —AFP photos



In a Damascus flea market, Sham Alloush rummaged through a pile of clothes for something nice to wear for Eid al-Fitr that wasn't too expensive. "The flea market is the only place I can buy something new to wear for the Eid holidays," the 28-year-old, dressed casually in large sunglasses and a tight yellow top, told AFP. "Had it not been for this place, I wouldn't have been able to buy new clothes at all."

Ravaged by war since 2011, heavily sanctioned Syria is also grappling with a severe economic crisis that has been compounded by a coronavirus lockdown and a dollar liquidity crunch in neighboring Lebanon. Prices have doubled over the past year, while the Syrian pound has reached record lows against the dollar this week, further driving up inflation.

With most of the population living in poverty, Syrians have increasingly turned to flea markets to purchase clothes at an affordable price. In a large street market in Damascus, customers perused stalls days ahead of the Eid al-Fitr holiday, which marks the end of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan. "The quality of the second-hand clothes is good, their price is acceptable and they suit people with limited income," said Sham, who has been visiting the flea market for years, usually around the holiday season.

But even this thrift haven is not immune to the soaring inflation gripping the entire country, she added. "The selection of clothes this year is limited and the prices are higher," Sham said, inspecting a pile of second-hand tops arranged haphazardly on a table. "But it is still cheaper than new ones."

### Impact of COVID-19

The value of the Syrian pound had plunged to more than 1,700 to the dollar this week in an all-time low, while the official rate remains fixed at 700. The devaluation has meant that a wide range of products, both imported and local, are now more expensive for war-weary Syrians already struggling to survive. In a rare acknowledgement of the currency crisis, the central bank warned Tuesday it would clamp down on currency "manipulators" driving up the market exchange rate.

A coronavirus lockdown since March has aggravated the







economic crisis, forcing businesses to temporarily close and leaving many daily wage earners without an income. Malek Abul Atta has just reopened his small shop ahead of Eid al-Fitr, after closing for weeks because of the COVID-19 pandemic. "I memorize my clients' faces and this year I have noticed new ones ahead of the holidays," he said.

For him and most of his customers, the flea market is the only "window for those who can't afford new clothes", the 52-year-old told AFP, as he arranged t-shirts and dresses on a rack by the side of the road. "The average monthly salary of an employee is simply not enough."

In another shop in the market, Ghassan Tabbah said business had never been so bad. "This is the worst holiday season we have seen in years," said the merchant, who had initially hoped he would recover losses sustained during the coronavirus lockdown this week.

#### No holiday cheer

With the Syrian pound dropping to unprecedented lows, Tabbah's business is just not reaping a profit. The businessman said he is offering items of clothing for 500 Syrian pounds (less than a dollar at the official rate) and yet no one is buying. Before Syria's economy crumbled, his customers included poor people searching for "anything to cover their bodies" to middle-class shoppers looking to buy "international brands" at a bargain, he said.

But now, "food is the main priority for everyone and clothes have become a secondary" luxury, Tabbah told AFP. With business slowing to a near-halt, the cost of keeping up shop has become too high for the merchant, forcing him to put his store up for sale a few days ago. He expects others will follow suit if the situation remains unchanged. "There is no holiday cheer this year," he said. "We haven't had a holiday in nearly ten years."

But for university student Dana Shawka, bargain shopping is in itself a source of joy. "I can buy three or four items from the flea market for the price of one new item" at a retail store, the 28-year-old told AFP as she scoured the market for a "catch". "Shopping in the flea market and searching for beautiful cheap clothes has become a tradition before the holiday." —AFP



Syrians shop for clothes at the flea market.







In an aerial view by drone, new social distancing circles are shown at Dolores Park on Wednesday in San Francisco. — AFP

## Calif to reopen filming; virus hub LA 'weeks behind'

California will unveil plans to reopen its world-famous entertainment industry next week but coronavirus hotspot Los Angeles faces further delays, the state's governor said Wednesday. Film and television productions in California have been shuttered since mid-March due to the pandemic. The majority of the state's 58 counties will "have the ability" to start reopening entertainment shoots following criteria to be set out in a roadmap Monday, Gavin Newsom said.

But Los Angeles county — home to Hollywood itself, and an entertainment industry which provided nearly 900,000 jobs pre-lockdown — presents "the challenge". "Even today, the number of deaths that came in, a disproportionate number came out of the county... we are a little concerned they'll be a few weeks behind potentially everybody else," said Newsom. Newsom's chief of staff described Los Angeles as "the biggest hurdle that we have with regard to your industry right". "I don't want to sugarcoat that... we have increasing cases in the LA area, and so because of that it is going to have some delays," said Ann O'Leary on a Zoom call with entertainment industry leaders.

Densely-populated Los Angeles county has 40,000 confirmed cases including nearly 2,000 deaths — well over half of the coronavirus fatalities in California. City officials warned this week that restaurants and shopping malls would not reopen until July 4 at earliest, even as other parts of the state ease restrictions. Netflix content chief Ted Sarandos, also on the Zoom call, warned that "taking shortcuts on safety" would have "terrible long term effects" on the industry. —AFP

## Disney World reopens a bit — but no rides yet

Walt Disney World cracked open its doors on Wednesday, offering dining and shopping to masked customers but leaving the beloved rides closed, as Florida begins to slowly get back to business after a coronavirus lockdown. As the park welcomed people to the Disney Springs shopping strip in Orlando, the new reality of life in the COVID-19 era was stark.

Parking was limited, barriers have been erected to encourage social distancing, visiting hours have been reduced and staffers repeatedly disinfected high-touch surfaces. People were asked to undergo temperature checks as they entered, and face masks are mandatory — grim stuff for "the happiest place on Earth".

Also posted on the Disney Springs website is this warning: "COVID-19 is an extremely contagious disease that can lead to severe illness and death. By visiting Disney Springs, you voluntarily assume all risks related to exposure to COVID-19." As part of Florida's phased reopening following a virtual economic shutdown in mid-March to curb the spread of the virus, more restaurants and bars will open up next week.

But there is no date yet for the reopening of the Sunshine State's wildly popular amusement parks — Disney World and



This file photo shows a general view of the Black Spire Outpost at the Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge Walt Disney World Resort at Disney's Hollywood Studios on August 27, 2019 in Orlando, Florida. — AFP

Universal Studios top the list. Most beaches in south Florida also remain closed. "Today's world is different, and it's going to require a shared responsibility, with everyone doing their part," Disney Springs vice president Matt Simon wrote in a blog post. Disney shares rose five percent on the New York Stock Exchange following press reports — denied by the company — that it would announce when the parks would reopen.

### Uneven Florida reopening

Florida began to slowly reactivate its economy two weeks ago in an uneven manner, with different rules in the state's dizzying patchwork of counties and cities. As of Wednesday, Florida

had officially reported more than 47,000 novel coronavirus cases, and nearly 2,100 fatalities, with the number of cases starting to drop. However, the figures may be inaccurate: a state health department worker has said that she was forced to undercount the number of cases, something that the office of Governor Ron DeSantis denies.

In some cases, residents from out of state are not being included in the tally, and in others, the victim's cause of death is attributed to underlying conditions, according to press reports. Florida's first phase of reopening does not include hotels, gyms, bars or movie theaters.

Since Monday, most restaurants in south Florida are allowed to be open at half-capacity, and all workers and customers must wear face masks. All passengers traveling through Miami's busy international airport must also wear masks. But in Miami Beach, a magnet for tourists worldwide, restaurants will not open until May 27.

The idea is to avoid a flood of visitors arriving for the long Memorial Day weekend — which traditionally marks the beginning of summer and begins on Friday. "We cannot interpret our phased reopening as a signal that the virus has left the community," warned Miami Beach Mayor Dan Gelber.

On Wednesday, just a few stores on Lincoln Road — an iconic open-air Miami Beach promenade — were open to the public. And people mostly stayed away. "We had a few customers throughout the day but not as many as we were anticipating," said Kylie Bentley, manager of an Urban Outfitters store. "But I heard from other stores in the state that it takes a couple of days for everyone to realize that we are open." — AFP



**T**wo months ago Guy Savoy was at the very top of the gastronomic tree. His Paris flagship restaurant had yet again been hailed as the best in the world by La Liste, with tables booked months in advance. Then the coronavirus came, closing restaurants across the planet. Now the three-star Michelin chef is making soup that you can heat up at home in your microwave. Not any old soup, of course, but Savoy's legendary artichoke soup with truffles, which comes delivered with a brioche speckled with mushrooms and truffles to dip into it.

"It breaks my heart to see a place that is usually so animated at lunchtime empty," Savoy told AFP, as he surveyed his elegant dining room at la Monnaie de Paris overlooking the River Seine and the Louvre museum. Its kitchens lie mostly empty, with their fridge doors open, with only the patisserie team hard at work preparing brioches and mousse au chocolat and rice pudding for takeaway.

#### 'We need comfort'

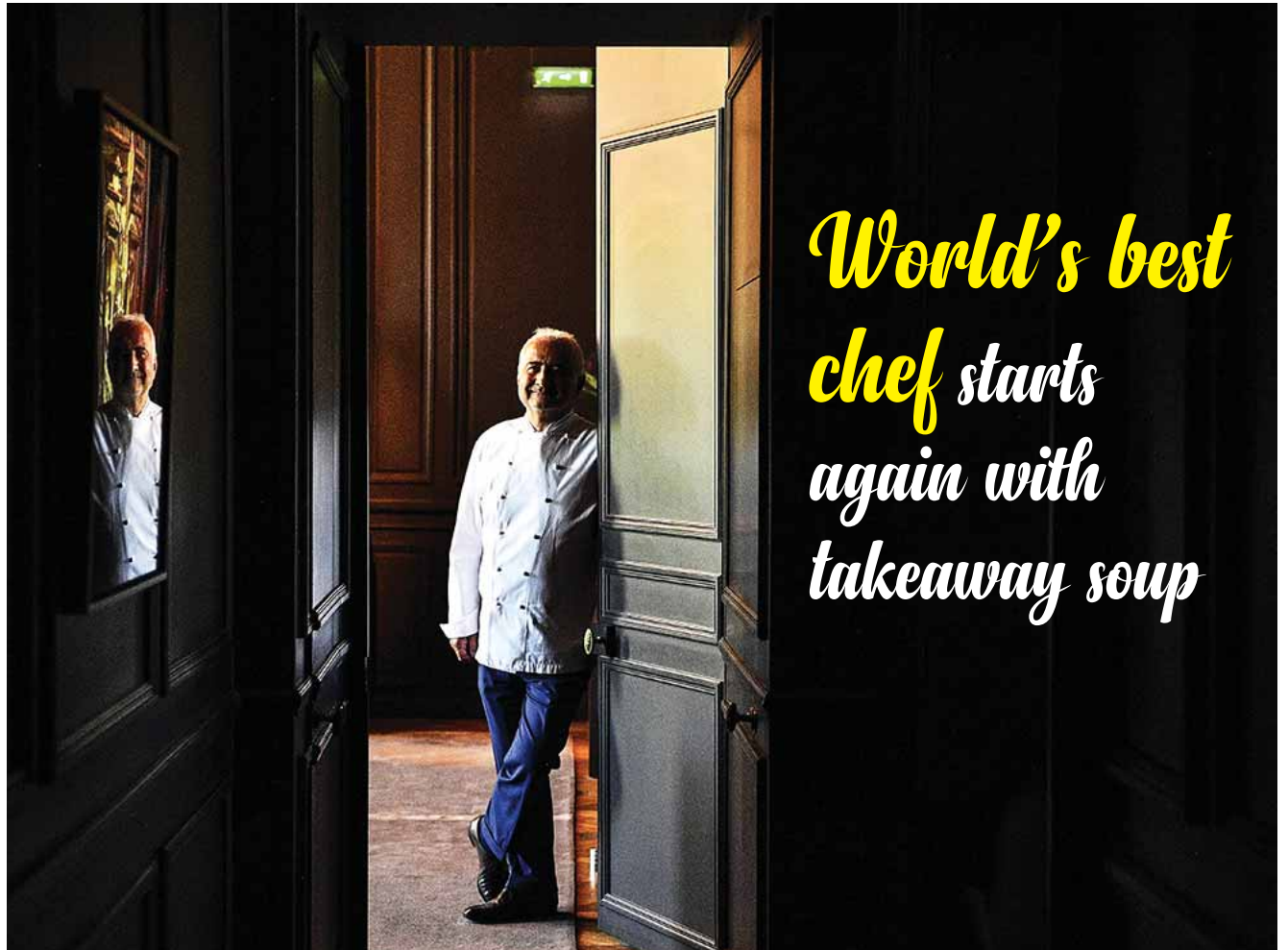
"These old-fashioned recipes bring us the comfort we need in these difficult times," Savoy said. Like a host of top French chefs including his great friend and rival Alain Ducasse, Savoy has started doing home deliveries because his well-heeled clients can no longer come to him. "Looked at from an economic point of view, what we are doing does not hold up," Savoy said, but it was important to keep in contact with his public.

He has come up with a limited takeaway menu of dishes specifically chosen so their taste would not be too adversely affected when they are reheated at a low temperature, like sole or quail confit. The famous artichoke soup comes in a glass jar to be gently reheated on a stove or at 600W in a microwave, with the truffle shavings wrapped separately to be added afterwards. Every dish comes with a little card explaining how best to heat and serve it, said chef Gilles Chesneau, with most of the meals prepared at the one-star Le Chiberta restaurant near the Champs Elysees.

#### Not running a deli

"We also advise people to leave the starters and the desserts to sit out for five minutes, which will help to bring out the flavors," he added. But this is not what Savoy's dreams are made of and he is chomping at the bit to get back. "I am not a traiteur (someone who runs a deli)," sighed the great chef, but it was helping get some of his staff back to work.

Like many top chefs, the lockdown has been an emotional as well as financial hit for Savoy. The brutal manner in which it was imposed on a Saturday night in mid-March made it even tougher for him. "I had to announce it to the guests, the words catching in my throat," he recalled.

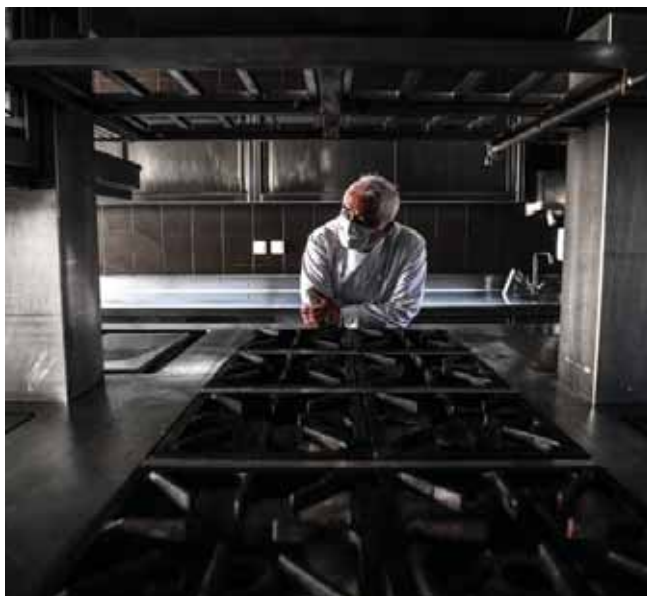


#### 'I was knocked out'

"I was knocked out. I have been working for 51 years and it is the first time I came up in front of an obstacle that I couldn't get over with work and energy. It's the feeling of being powerless," he said. But on the bright side, Savoy said it wasn't like we have been through a war or an earthquake. "The building is intact and my teams still have their know-how. We can restart quickly."

When that will be is another question, however. Many believe restaurants will not be able to open in France until at least July, and then with tight social distancing restrictions, which should be less of a problem for top end addresses like Savoy's. "They closed us in four hours. I not saying that we will be able to reopen as quick, but in 36 to 48 hours I could get the operation going again,"

he said. Unlike some younger chefs, Savoy said he doesn't "believe in this talk of the world before and after (the coronavirus)." "This crisis is just a moment during which we will have to take a lot of precautions." Which does not mean he is not worried about when and if foreign tourists will return to Paris, the world's most visited city. They make up around 40 percent of his diners, most of them Americans and Koreans. "Paris needs the whole planet to work. If there are no tourists, half of the restaurants will disappear," Savoy warned. — AFP



French chef Guy Savoy poses outside his Guy Savoy restaurant at La Monnaie de Paris in Paris on May 19, 2020. — AFP photos



Savoy poses with a face mask in the empty kitchen of his restaurant.





In this photo taken on March 11, 2020, Brazilian indigenous leaders and tribe members hold a protest demanding the demarcation of indigenous lands in Brasilia. – AFP

## Virus a 'genocide' threat for Amazon, warns Salgado

Legendary photographer Sebastiao Salgado has warned of a "genocide" of the Amazon's indigenous peoples if the Brazilian government does not do more to protect them from the coronavirus. The country's far-right president, Jair Bolsonaro – who has dismissed the virus as a "little flu" – has long been accused of encouraging loggers and farmers to invade indigenous reserves and of dismantling government agencies set up to protect them.



Sebastiao Salgado

Brazilian-born Salgado, who shot to fame with his almost biblical images of gold miners in the Amazon, told AFP that "there was a huge risk of a real catastrophe". "With gold miners, loggers, farmers and religious sects invading their territories... there is a big risk of the coronavirus infecting the indigenous people, who don't have any antibodies."

According to some estimates, 90 percent of the native population of the Americas was wiped out by disease after the arrival of the first Europeans. Salgado has launched a petition calling for action to protect the Amazonian peoples which has garnered almost a quarter of a million signatures, including Madonna, Oprah Winfrey and Brad Pitt. He said the risk of genocide was not an exaggeration.

### 'Near collapse'

"That is what I call it. Genocide is the elimination of an ethnic group and also of its culture. "I believe that is where the Bolsonaro government is leading us, because their position is 100 percent against the indigenous people." With hospitals in Sao Paulo, Brazil's biggest city, reported to be at "near collapse" as the country has become the epicentre of the pandemic in South America, Salgado warned that the threat of death was hanging "over a large portion of the population".

"Bolsonaro is against a lockdown, and they do not have the medical infrastructure that we have" in Europe, said Salgado, 76, who has long lived in Paris. "If the virus gets into the forest, they don't have the means to help. The distances are so huge. The indigenous people will be abandoned," the photographer said.

The virus has already infected 40 indigenous groups, with 537 positive cases and 102 deaths, according to the Brazilian Indigenous Peoples' Association. And on Tuesday, the indigenous rights group, Forest Guardians, warned that one tribe of hunter gatherers, the Awa Guaja, which traditionally has no contact with the outside world, was in danger of being wiped out because of encroachment by loggers and farmers.—AFP

## Director calls for ecological rethink

Acclaimed Israeli film director Amos Gitai, a critic of extremists in his country, said the coronavirus pandemic should force people to rethink values and their lifestyle's impact on the planet. "At a time of crisis, it's a good thing to seize the moment to try to find some perspective," he told AFP. "Maybe the overlying message of this virus to humanity in general terms (relates to) the destruction of the environment."

An award-winning documentary-maker, Gitai has made films exploring the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the 1995 assassination of prime minister Yitzhak Rabin by a Jewish extremist opposed to the Oslo peace accords. Gitai said in an interview via the online video chat service Zoom that he had been in New York to screen some of his work in early March when the city shut down to curb the virus outbreak.

He flew to Paris and remains in the French capital "trying to think what can be done", while striving to write during the lockdown. Gitai, who hails from the northern Israeli city of Haifa, narrowly escaped death while fighting in the 1973 Yom Kippur War when his helicopter was hit by a Syrian missile. "We know wars, especially in the Middle East," Gitai told AFP. But he said the "invisible" threat of the coronavirus marked a new challenge, and required a different response. "Greed and advanced capitalism destroy... the planet," he added. "Green space is being taken over for economic reasons."

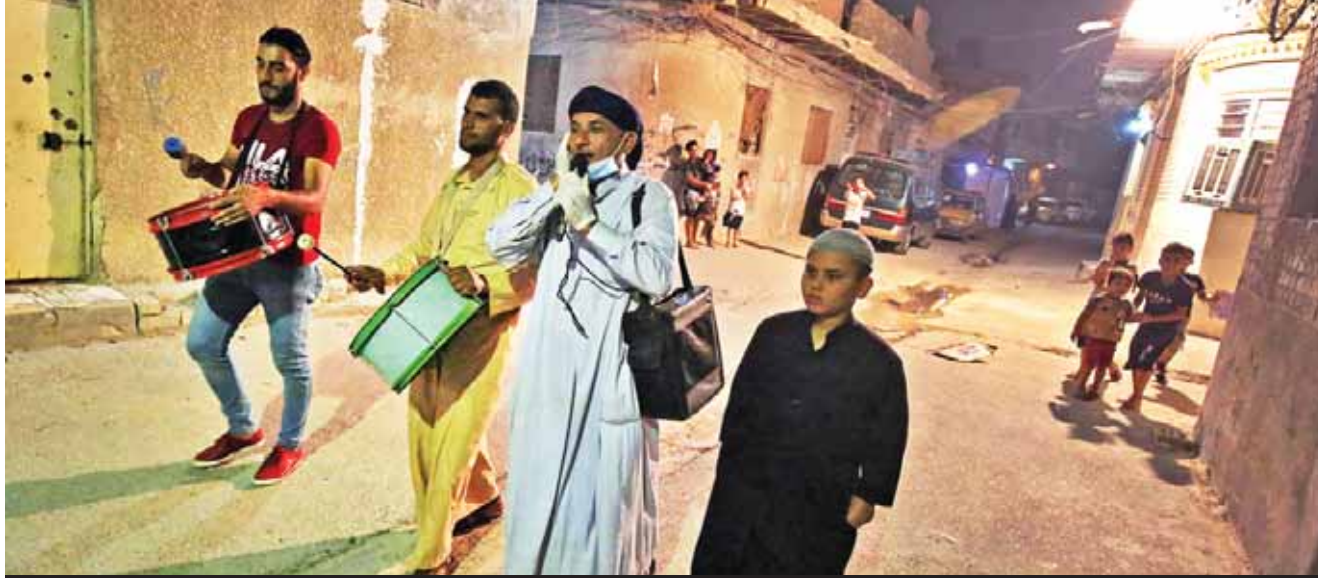
### 'Freedom of culture'

Gitai is one of 200 prominent artists who co-signed a widely circulated petition headlined "No to a Return to Normal". The piece – spearheaded by actress Juliette Binoche and co-signed by Robert de Niro, Cate Blanchett and others – calls for an overhaul of post-pandemic global values to stave off an "ecological disaster". For Gitai, the call was intended to force people to rethink consumption habits as a sense of normalcy returns.

Gitai has previously warned that policies pursued by the Israeli right were pushing the country towards "suicide". He has blamed the assassination of Rabin, a leader of the leftwing Labour party, on an atmosphere of hate he says was whipped up by the right, including by then opposition figure Benjamin Netanyahu. Netanyahu on Sunday extended his record-long tenure as Israeli prime minister when parliament swore in a new unity government.

The terms of the coalition see Netanyahu staying on as prime minister for 18 months, before vacating the premier's office for his election rival, Benny Gantz. Gitai has accused Netanyahu-led governments of seeking to stifle dissent from those critical of the right's agenda, including its effort to expand Jewish settlement in the occupied West Bank. He said he has followed political developments at home from Paris and voiced hope Israel "will not be manipulated (and) that there will be freedom of education and culture". Gitai has also accused the Israeli right of "constant harassment and attempts to silence" peace activists who are trying to strive for a settlement with the Palestinians. – AFP





In this file photo taken on May 7, 2020, Sayyed Mozahem, the “musaharati” (second right), calls for Muslims to have their final meal before a new day of fasting begins with the sunrise in a small neighborhood of the Iraqi capital Baghdad. – AFP photos



Members of a family peek from the window to watch the musaharati.

## IN BAGHDAD, CALLS TO PRAY AND KEEP COVID-19 AWAY

**B**aghdad, a city of nearly ten million residents, is running on an unusual rhythm this Ramadan since Iraq imposed an overnight curfew to curb the spreading coronavirus. A few hours before dawn, the wailing voice of Sayyed Mozahem rings out across a small neighborhood in old Baghdad, amplified by his portable microphone.

Mozahem is the neighborhood “musaharati”, responsible during Ramadan for reminding Muslims to have their final meal before a new day of fasting begins with the sunrise. “Fasters, wake up,” he chants, marching through the streets to the beat of his traditional drum as his older brother and father did before him. But he refrains from a special twist: “May Ramadan keep the coronavirus away,” and “God, spare Iraq from COVID-19”.

Iraqis are adapting their Ramadan routines to fit a curfew from 5 pm until 5 am – the hours Baghdad usually comes alive with huge fast-breaking feasts, late-night runs for sweets and midnight mosque visits. Instead, Iraqis are rushing through checkpoints before the lockdown starts, praying alone at home and baking traditional sweets usually bought in stores. A somber and isolating mood has settled over the capital, where the response to the novel coronavirus has left its mark from dawn until dusk.

### Beating the curfews

After Mozahem wraps up his pre-drawn call – technically a violation of the nighttime curfew – the sun rises over Baghdad, the second most populous Arab capital. By noon the heat is bearing down on the streets, sending traffic police in search of slivers of shade. The call to prayer rings out from hundreds of mosques, urging Muslims to worship from

home. Soon after, it’s Moussa Al-Bedeiri’s turn. Twice a day, the firefighter uses the megaphone on his firetruck to urge people to stay home, avoid gatherings and wash their hands regularly. His throat and lips are cracked but as a devout Muslim Bedeiri refrains from drinking during the long sweltering days. “As the coronavirus spread, our work has doubled. We had more sanitization campaigns and broadcasts of official guidelines through loudspeakers on the civil defense vehicles and at our centre,” he tells AFP.



The blinding sun dims into a late-afternoon haze as 22-year-old Mortada zips through traffic on his motorcycle. Strapped to the back are food packages that Mortada needs to deliver before the curfew begins. Restaurants have been closed to patrons for around two months but as restrictions have eased, they have been permitted to open for home deliveries.

Mortada makes less than a half-dozen deliveries per day now, about a quarter of his usual haul during Ramadan. The twin shocks of coronavirus restrictions and falling oil prices have hit Iraq hard, and may double the current poverty rate to 40 percent, the World Bank has predicted.

### Eerie evenings

The sun is preparing to set, casting long shadows across the vast esplanade of Baghdad’s Abdelqader Al-Gailani mausoleum, where a revered Sufi figure is buried. For the first time in his life,

echoes across the city. Iraqis bite in to modest dinners at home with family, reminiscing about past elaborate meals where dozens of relatives, neighbors and friends were invited. Instead of strolls through halogen-lit streets to pick up sweets or toys, they wile away the nighttime hours with card games or television.

On the nightly news broadcast, Iraqi channels announce the new coronavirus numbers: more than 3,600 cases across the country and over 130 deaths. The numbers are rising faster now, a grim lead-up to the Eid al-Fitr holiday – usually



70-year-old sheikh Yalmaz Youssef is seeing the shrine and attached mosque empty. “Since the ‘70s and until this day, I have never seen the door of the holy shrine of Sheikh Abdelqader closed. But when I did, I cried,” Youssef tells AFP.

As dusk settles, the dainty garlands decorating the mosque light up and the sunset prayer – calling on Muslims to break their fast at home –

a joyful occasion for extended family gatherings. As twilight approaches, a drum echoes through the darkened streets and the musaharati begins calling Muslims to their final pre-fast meal. Baghdad’s new routine begins all over again. — AFP



Kids Page

Daily SuDoku

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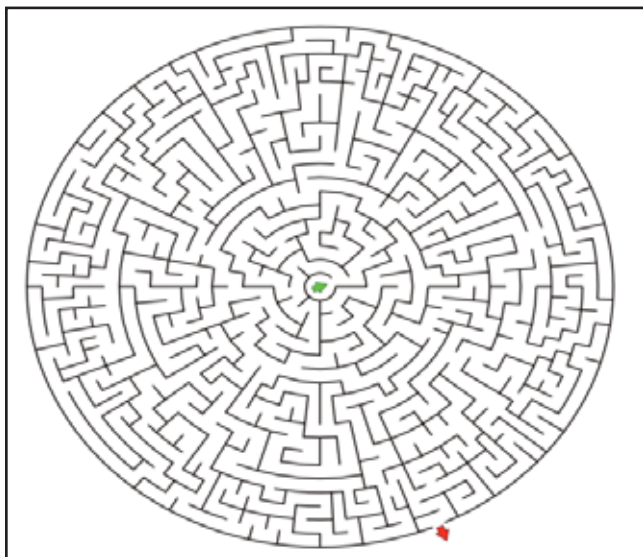
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Yesterday's Solution

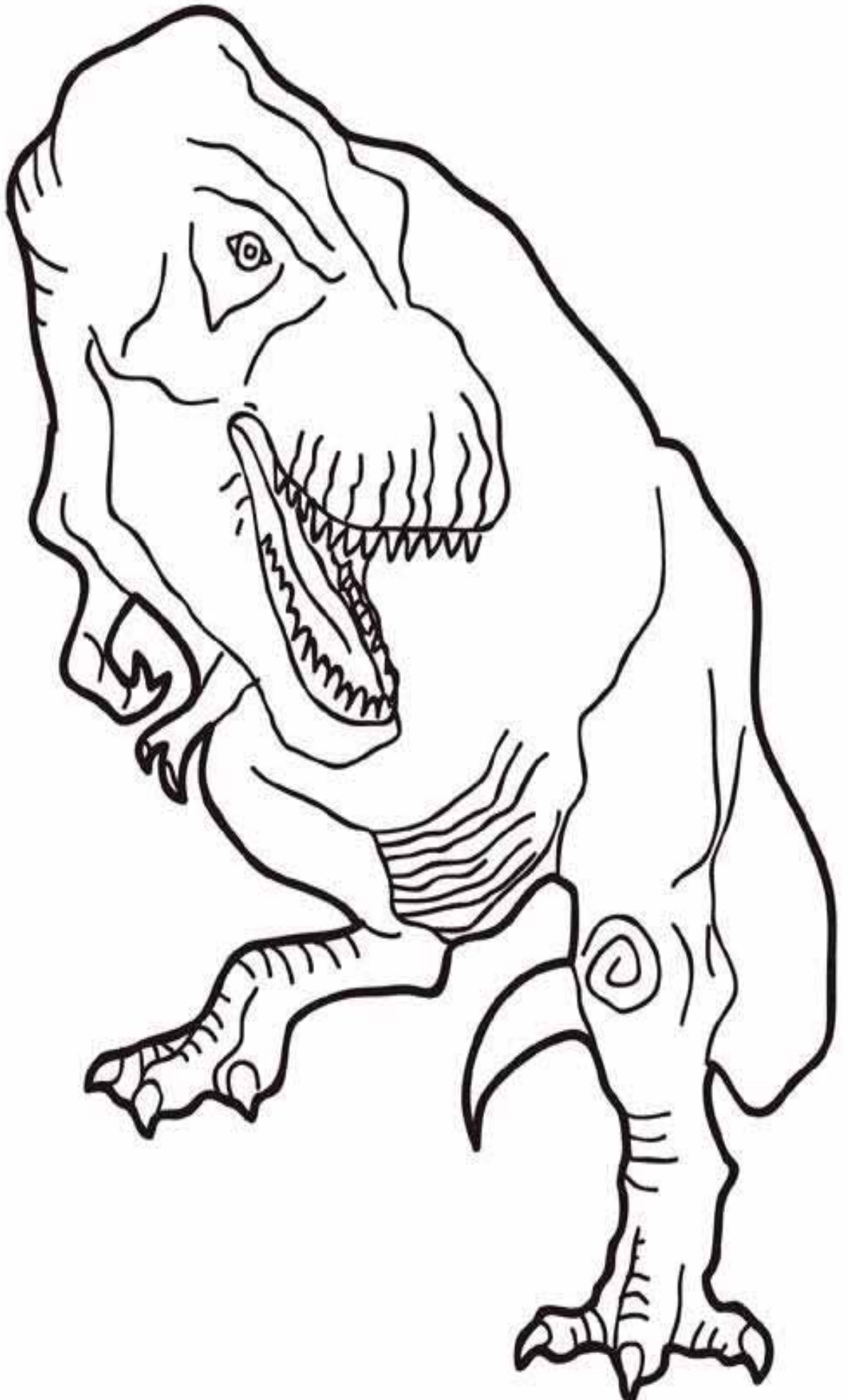
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Kids Mazes



Color It





### Join the dots



### TOY STORY

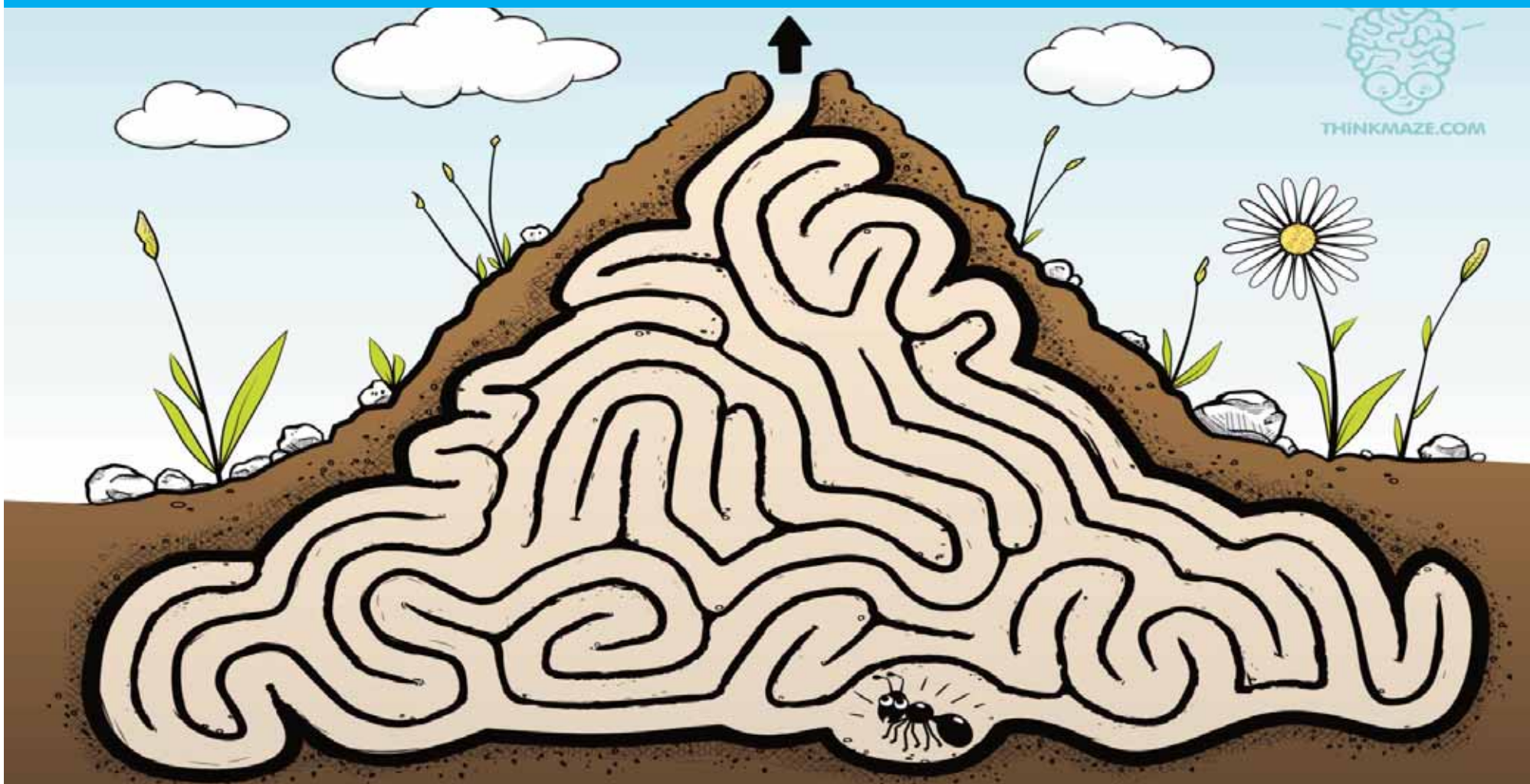
#### Word Search

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



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|-----------|-----------------|---------|
| ALIVE     | COWBOY          | PUPPY   |
| ANDY      | DOLL            | REX     |
| ANIMATION | FRIENDS         | RIVALS  |
| ARMY MEN  | HAMM            | SHERIFF |
| ASTRONAUT | LIGHTYEAR       | SID     |
| BO PEEP   | MOVING          | SLINKY  |
| BUZZ      | MR. POTATO HEAD | TOYS    |
| COMEDY    | PIXAR           | WOODY   |

### Find the way





# CLINIC PAGE



Kuwait Times

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 ENT Consultant, Laryngologist

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- ◆ Laryngology Fellowship, McGill University- Canada.
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- ◆ Member of the American Academy of Otolaryngology Head & Neck Surgery.
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## Stars

## STAR TRACK

**Aries (March 21-April 19)**

You can cut through to the truth quite easily today, Aries, so don't hesitate to do it. If you're behind the wheel at an intersection where no one seems to know who should go next, take the initiative and go. It might not be a bad idea to signal your intentions to the other drivers before making your move. Being aggressive with your actions doesn't mean you have to be reckless during this cautious time.

**Taurus (April 20-May 20)**

You want to keep your ship on an even keel today, Taurus, but no matter how hard you try, this simply might not be possible. The wind is blowing pretty hard, and you might just have to trim your sails and go full speed ahead. You'll move much more quickly, but it will also mean that you'll be more prone to capsizing. Live on the edge? metaphorically speaking. Because we're all supposed to be safe these days!

**Gemini (May 21-June 20)**

This is your day to shine in many respects, Gemini. The action you take is right on target, so draw back your arrow as far as you can before letting it fly. There is a quiet strength to your being that comes out occasionally. When it does, people will really notice your subtle heroism. Today gives you the opportunity to display your incredible strength and passion to the world. Don't hold back.

**Cancer (June 21-July 22)**

You may wonder why everyone is so serious and emotional all of a sudden, although you're likely feeling it, too. Take this as a reminder that there are many different walks of life and not all of them necessarily intersect your path, even though we're all in this pandemic together. If circumstances beyond your control try to shut you down today, Cancer, prepare to defend yourself and your motives? within reason, of course.

**Leo (July 23-August 22)**

Don't put up with anyone's shenanigans, Leo. You'd rather not waste your precious time and energy on those who see you as a fair-weather friend or emotional crutch. Concentrate on your own problems. If someone has a sob story, you'll say exactly what you think instead of padding the honest truth with a bunch of feel-good fluff. You won't win any points for empathy, but maybe that doesn't matter today.

**Virgo (August 23-September 22)**

You may have the intellectual side of the equation completely set in your head, Virgo. You've collected all the facts and have all the data worked out in such a way that it's impossible for anyone to fault your calculations. Don't think you're done, though, because there's one part of the picture you haven't considered? emotions. Extreme feelings could throw a monkey wrench into your plans. Be prepared.

**Libra (September 23-October 22)**

Other people might have a hard time navigating through the day, thanks to intensity, corruption, or the impersonal cruelties of COVID-19. You have nothing to worry about, Libra, because your adaptable nature is perfectly suited to dealing with the stubborn forces and insoluble puzzles. This is a good time to clean out your closet and throw away things you no longer need. Be ruthless.

**Scorpio (October 23-November 21)**

Secure your bunker and make sure it's fully stocked with heavy artillery, because there is bound to be a battle, Scorpio. Trust that you need to be fully prepared if you enter the fight today. The battles that you actually like are the ones that get things rolling and produce results. It will soon become clear which type this is. (But don't hoard when stocking that bunker? hoarding is unfair to your neighbors.)

**Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)**

You tend to get quite emotional about things, Sagittarius, even though you don't always show it to the outside world. The difference today is that more people are likely to openly act on their emotions, which means that you can feel safer about exposing your true feelings to the people in your life. Have faith that you'll find friends who share similar opinions on this day.

**Capricorn (December 22-January 19)**

If situations get too hot and heavy, Capricorn, your first instinct is to exit the conversation or jump to the next subject before anyone notices you're avoiding the serious ones. That's one way to deal with today's intensity, but your gut tells you it isn't the best way. What you really need to do is dig deep and take advantage of this emotional energy to thoroughly take care of things instead of skim over them.

**Aquarius (January 20-February 18)**

Your actions today could take an investigative approach, Aquarius. You're able to probe much more deeply than usual as you analyze people's motivations for the answers you seek. Feel free to take aggressive action based on your gut instincts. Use your powerful emotions as a tool instead of something that holds you back. People may ask you for advice, and you're in the perfect position to give it.

**Pisces (February 19-March 20)**

Your courageous strength and desire to take a leadership role may be threatening to others today, Pisces. Don't automatically assume the dominant position before learning what other people feel about the situation. You could make some drastic mistakes if you don't watch out for the well-being of others. Things could get quite emotional, so beware of getting caught in? or even causing? these potential flare-ups.

## Country Codes

Afghanistan	0093	Iran	0098
Albania	00355	Iraq	00964
Algeria	00213	Ireland	00353
Andorra	00376	Italy	0039
Angola	00244	Ivory Coast	00225
Anguilla	001264	Jamaica	001876
Antigua	001268	Japan	0081
Argentina	0054	Jordan	00962
Armenia	00374	Kazakhstan	007
Australia	0061	Kenya	00254
Austria	0043	Kiribati	00686
Bahamas	001242	Kuwait	00965
Bahrain	00973	Kyrgyzstan	00996
Bangladesh	00880	Laos	00856
Barbados	001246	Latvia	00371
Belarus	00375	Lebanon	00961
Belgium	0032	Liberia	00231
Belize	00501	Libya	00218
Benin	00229	Lithuania	00370
Bermuda	001441	Luxembourg	00352
Bhutan	00975	Macau	00853
Bolivia	00591	Macedonia	00389
Bosnia	00387	Madagascar	00261
Botswana	00267	Majorca	0034
Brazil	0055	Malawi	00265
Brunei	00673	Malaysia	0060
Bulgaria	00359	Maldives	00960
Burkina Faso	00226	Mali	00223
Burundi	00257	Malta	00356
Cambodia	00855	Marshall Islands	00692
Cameroon	00237	Martinique	00596
Canada	001	Mauritania	00222
Cape Verde	00238	Mauritius	00230
Cayman Islands	001345	Mayotte	00269
Central African Republic	00236	Mexico	0052
Chad	00235	Micronesia	00691
Chile	0056	Moldova	00373
China	0086	Monaco	00377
Colombia	0057	Mongolia	00976
Comoros	00269	Montserrat	001664
Congo	00242	Morocco	00212
Cook Islands	00682	Mozambique	00258
Costa Rica	00506	Myanmar (Burma)	0095
Croatia	00385	Namibia	00264
Cuba	0053	Nepal	00977
Cyprus	00357	Netherlands (Holland)	0031
Cyprus (Northern)	0090392	Netherlands Antilles	00599
Czech Republic	00420	New Caledonia	00687
Denmark	0045	New Zealand	0064
Diego Garcia	00246	Nicaragua	00505
Djibouti	00253	Niger	00227
Dominica	001767	Nigeria	00234
Dominican Republic	001809	Niue	00683
Ecuador	00593	Norfolk Island	00672
Egypt	0020	Northern Ireland (UK)	0044
El Salvador	00503	North Korea	00850
England (UK)	0044	Norway	0047
Equatorial Guinea	00240	Oman	00968
Eritrea	00291	Pakistan	0092
Estonia	00372	Palau	00680
Ethiopia	00251	Panama	00507
Falkland Islands	00500	Papua New Guinea	00675
Faroe Islands	00298	Paraguay	00595
Fiji	00679	Peru	0051
Finland	00358	Philippines	0063
France	0033	Poland	0048
French Guiana	00594	Portugal	00351
French Polynesia	00689	Puerto Rico	001787
Gabon	00241	Qatar	00974
Gambia	00220	Romania	0040
Georgia	00995	Russian Federation	007
Germany	0049	Rwanda	00250
Ghana	00233	Saint Helena	00290
Gibraltar	00350	Saint Kitts	001869
Greece	0030	Saint Lucia	001758
Greenland	00299	Saint Pierre	00508
Grenada	001473	Saint Vincent	001784
Guadeloupe	00590	Samoa US	00684
Guam	001671	Samoa West	00685
Guatemala	00502	San Marino	00378
Guinea	00224	Sao Tome	00239
Guyana	00592	Saudi Arabia	00966
Haiti	00509	Scotland (UK)	0044
Holland (Netherlands)	0031	Senegal	00221
Honduras	00504	Seychelles	00284
Hong Kong	00852	Sierra Leone	00232
Hungary	0036	Singapore	0065
Ibiza (Spain)	0034	Slovakia	00421
Iceland	00354	Slovenia	00386
India	0091	Solomon Islands	00677
Indian Ocean	00873	Somalia	00252
Indonesia	0062	South Africa	0027



## Business

FRIDAY, MAY 22, 2020

**34** FCA-PSA deal terms 'set in stone' for 50-50 merger**35** Germany agrees on rescue Package for Lufthansa**36** GCC financing needs likely to balloon in the near-term

**SHENZHEN:** An instructor leading newly-hired Huawei employees in a class at Huawei University in Dongguan in China's southern Guangdong province. Construction cranes at Huawei's headquarters in the city of Shenzhen, neighboring Dongguan, busily expand an already massive faux-European campus that Walt Disney would envy, as well as an in-house "university" that trains the Chinese telecom giant's growing global workforce. —AFP

# Huawei's ambitions unbowed

## US fails to stop Chinese giant in its tracks

**SHENZHEN:** Construction cranes at Huawei's headquarters busily expand an already massive faux-European campus that Walt Disney would envy, as well as an in-house "university" that trains the Chinese telecom giant's growing global workforce. If the United States hoped to stop the company in its tracks, it hasn't yet.

An escalating US effort to block supplies of vital semiconductors to a company it views as a security risk has Huawei officials and staff speaking anew of a sense of "crisis" on its huge campuses in and around the southern Chinese city of Shenzhen.

But despite Washington's now 18-month campaign — and the current coronavirus pandemic — staffing and the company's big ambitions continue to grow. The new US pressure "has naturally led to some concerns", said Huawei University's deputy director, Ryan Liu. "But I've worked for Huawei many years and

we are confident the company will guide us on the correct path."

The US Commerce Department said Friday it was tightening efforts to deny Huawei access to global semiconductor supplies. Huawei on Monday said the move will disrupt world supply chains and threaten the company's "survival". "If the spirit of the ruling is followed, it would have a major impact on Huawei," said Kelsey Broderick, analyst with Eurasia Group consultancy. Huawei's ability to find homegrown replacement chips is "low" at best, she said.

### European village

But Washington has repeatedly granted reprieves for earlier sanctions on Huawei, and the US may face opposition from American and foreign chipmakers who would suddenly lose orders from Huawei. "There are questions re-

maining over how strict the ruling will be, in both implementation and enforcement," Broderick said. Huawei — a dominant presence in Shenzhen, headquarters for a number of huge Chinese tech titans — projects a business-as-usual front.

Since Washington singled out the firm as a proxy target in the wider US-China trade struggle beginning in late 2018, its global staff has grown from 180,000 to 194,000 now, company officials say. It announced 19 percent growth in its global businesses in 2019 despite the pressure. The expanding "European village" complex, housing 25,000 staff, sprawls around a lake, linked by red and orange trains that stop at stations including "Paris", "Bologna", and "Heidelberg", each with plazas and architecture recalling those cities.

Eleven such themed zones are finished and another is being built. Huawei University, mean-

while, will be moving in August to newer and bigger European-style facilities. Washington fears China could use Huawei's telecom networking systems worldwide for espionage or cyber-sabotage.

The company is expected to become a global leader in coming fifth-generation, or 5G, wireless networks, and Washington has lobbied other countries to shun its equipment over potential security risks.

But current chairman Guo Ping said this week the US is driven by fear of losing the technological edge to Chinese companies, and Huawei officials have continuously said Washington's threats merely make it stronger. Staff echo that, telling AFP that US moves to deny access to Google services on its Android smartphones led Huawei to accelerate production of its proprietary HarmonyOS operating system, unveiled last year. — AFP



## Business

# FCA-PSA deal terms 'set in stone' for 50-50 merger

## FCA, PSA to merge to create world's No 4 carmaker

**MILAN:** Terms of a planned merger between Fiat Chrysler and Peugeot-owner PSA are set in stone, FCA's chairman said on Wednesday, brushing off talk that some aspects of the deal might be re-negotiated because of the COVID-19 crisis.

FCA and PSA have entered a binding agreement to create the world's fourth largest carmaker that FCA's chairman John Elkann confirmed was expected to close in the first quarter of next year. But FCA has come in for criticism in Italy over a 5.5 billion euro (\$6.03 billion) special dividend that is part of the PSA deal after its local business said it was in talks with Rome and Intesa Sanpaolo over a 6.3 billion euro state-backed loan to cope with the COVID-19 crisis. The potential payment of such a big dividend to shareholders when the coronavirus crisis has left cash-starved manufacturers pushing for government support has been questioned within Italy's ruling coalition.

But FCA Chairman Elkann said the terms of the merger agreement had not changed. "The terms of the FCA-PSA deal are set in stone as binding contracts in their nature are," Elkann said in conference call after the annual shareholder meeting of Exor, the Agnelli family holding com-

pany which controls FCA.

"It was a clear cash and equity agreement to reach a 50-50 merger deal between FCA shareholders and PSA shareholders," Elkann said. "Both parties in FCA-PSA deal are committed to get parity in the merger deal."

Elkann is also chairman and CEO of Exor.

The dividend - to be paid by parent company Fiat Chrysler Automobiles NV in the Netherlands - is a central part of the overall value of the merger, but Italy could look into it, a senior government source has said. "This is a loan which is really designed to help the automotive sector in Italy which we know is a very important part of the Italian economy," Elkann said, referring to the state-backed loan. Treasury undersecretary Pier Paolo Baretta on Wednesday told Reuters that Rome might consider extending a ban on dividend payments for companies accessing state guarantee from an existing deadline of December 31, 2020 to a 12-month period following the loan guarantee concession.

"That would be reasonable. Doing more may hit the companies' value," Baretta said. This could potentially complicate FCA's plans, as the special dividend payment is due just before the closing of the merger with PSA.



**WARREN, MICHIGAN:** United Auto Workers members leave the Fiat Chrysler Automobiles Warren Truck Plant after the first work shift in Warren, Michigan. — AFP

Some analysts suggested some of the merger's terms - in particular the amount of the special dividend, which was agreed before the coronavirus outbreak - could be reviewed to take account of the current state of the stock market and the au-

tomotive market and to preserve cash at the automaker. Elkann said the reasons for FCA-PSA merger were "stronger than ever" and that preparatory work for the 50-50 tie-up was proceeding "on time and as envisaged." — Reuters

## Eurozone economy has 'likely bottomed out'

**BRUSSELS:** The eurozone's economic slump has "likely bottomed out" after the bloc suffered a disastrous collapse under lockdowns to contain coronavirus, a closely watched survey by IHS Markit said yesterday.

The contraction across the 19 EU nations using the euro continued in May for the third straight month.

But "the rate of decline eased as parts of the economy started to emerge from lockdowns," the firm's purchasing managers' index (PMI) revealed.

The index for May came in at 30.5 points—well above the catastrophic, record-busting 13.5 recorded in April, but still below the 50-point threshold between contraction and expansion. "The eurozone saw a further collapse of business activity in May but the survey data at least brought reassuring signs that the downturn likely bottomed out in April," IHS Markit's chief business economist Chris Williamson said.

Eurozone GDP in the second quarter

"is still likely to fall at an unprecedented rate, down by around 10 percent compared to the first quarter, but the rise in the PMI adds to expectations that the downturn should continue to moderate as lockdown restrictions are further lifted heading into the summer," he said.

Another economy-watching firm, Capital Economics, agreed that the data pointed to the eurozone's economy having "probably reached the bottom in April, providing some hope that the economy is now slowly on the road to recovery". It cautioned that the euro area would likely be "remaining very depressed even as lockdown measures are being gradually lifted".

### 'Unprecedented' job-cutting

The PMI survey, which has business managers comparing their manufacturing and services output to the previous month, showed the coronavirus pandemic was responsible for closing non-essential businesses, disrupting supply chains and diminishing demand.

Job cutting continued at an "unprecedented" rate, with only a modest slowing compared to April, as companies shed payrolls to cope with lower demand.

"Furlough schemes were often cited as having reduced the near-term need to reduce staffing numbers, but longer-term job retention depends on the speed at which order books will refill,"

IHS Markit said.

"Social distancing and other virus-related lockdown measures continued to hit businesses such as hotels, restaurants, travel and tourism and other consumer-facing firms especially hard, resulting in the third-steepest decline ever recorded," it said.

Pessimism among the surveyed managers remained high for the coming 12 months, it noted. The so-called "flash" PMI contained specific figures only from the eurozone's two biggest national economies, Germany and France, and more general data from the rest of the eurozone.

Germany showed a milder downturn, at 34.1 points, than in France, on 32 points, "while the rest of the eurozone saw the steepest decline".

Capital Economics said France's worse showing was "unsurprising" since it eased its restrictions later than Germany and more slowly.

The economic analysis unit of the Dutch bank ING said the PMI showing lingering malaise in the eurozone "buries any final hopes of a V-shaped recovery" in which activity would have sharply bounced back. "It confirms that a quick recovery of output is not what we're seeing," it said, adding that "the majority of businesses are still experiencing contraction or no change from a very low base" and "the pace of job cuts remains the most concerning". — AFP

## UK economy shows signs of bottoming out

**LONDON:** Britain's economy flattened out a bit this month from its nosedive in April, but it remains in the grip of a severe contraction caused by the coronavirus lockdown, a business survey showed yesterday. An index measuring activity in the dominant services sector and in manufacturing rose to 28.9 in May's preliminary purchasing managers' index from 13.8 in April's final reading. IHS Markit, which publishes the data, said the pace of decline remained far worse than at any point during the global financial crisis a decade ago.

But Chris Williamson, IHS Markit's chief business economist, said he expected a further improvement next month.

"June should hopefully be better as lockdown restrictions ease," he wrote on Twitter. Andrew Wishart, an economist with Capital Economics reaffirmed his forecast of a 20 percent slump in the economy between April and June. "Much more importantly, we expect the pace of the recovery to be sluggish," he said. IHS Markit said companies reported a severe lack of new business and, although business expectations improved for a second month in a row, many firms said they were worried it would take a long time to recover.

Some service sector companies remained deeply pessimistic about their near-term prospects. Britain's chief budget forecaster said on Sunday that April was probably the bottom of the crash as the government is now moving to gradually ease its lockdown restrictions but that the economy was unlikely to bounce back.

IHS Markit said many firms which had temporarily laid off workers had furloughed more than half their staff, using an emergency government scheme to pay 80 percent of their wages. Employment was down again in May although the fall was a bit less precipitous than in April. — Reuters



## Business

# Britain borrows at negative interest rate for first time

## BoE bond purchases and negative rate talk drive yields down

**LONDON:** Britain sold a government bond with a negative yield for the first time on Wednesday, meaning the government is effectively being rewarded for borrowing after investors agreed to be repaid slightly less than they lent. It joins Japan, Germany and some other European countries in selling debt yielding less than 0%, reflecting the prospect the coronavirus pandemic will cause a severe global recession and bond-buying by central banks to mitigate its impact.

Wednesday's auction saw 3.75 billion pounds (\$4.6 billion) of gilts maturing in July 2023 sold at an average yield of -0.003 percent.

While investors will receive annual interest of 0.75 percent, they paid above face value for the bond so the cash return will be less than they have lent if they hold the debt to maturity. "The

impact of the Bank of England's rate cuts and increased asset purchases is absolutely clear from this morning's groundbreaking gilt auction," said Hugh Gimber, global market strategist at JP Morgan Asset Management.

The BoE cut interest rates to a record-low 0.1 percent in March and began buying 200 billion pounds of assets, mostly gilts, to help the economy and cap a spike in yields seen at the start of the coronavirus crisis.

Financial markets also see a strong chance that the BoE will cut its main interest rate below zero later this year, although economists are more doubtful. Negative interest rates potentially challenge some banks' and building societies' solvency as they find it hard or impossible to apply them to customers' savings accounts.

Former BoE Governor Mark Carney strongly opposed the idea, but some policymakers have said they are reconsidering it.

Yields for two-year benchmark gilts, which are sensitive to BoE rate expectations, sank to a record low of -0.051 percent last week.

Appetite for British debt has been strong since the BoE started its purchases—a relief for the government, which is on course to borrow hundreds of billions of pounds this year after measures to stop contagion shut down the economy.

Demand for Wednesday's bond was low by recent standards: investors bid for just over twice the amount offered, the weakest demand since before the BoE cut rates. By contrast, a new 10-year gilt last week drew a record \$100

billion in orders.

The negative yield does not mean all buyers will lose money, as some may be hoping the bond's price will rise further and they can sell it on, said Marc Ostwald, strategist at ADM Investor Services.

Others would be looking to hedge against the risk of the BoE cutting rates below zero, he added. For British company pension funds, which are limited in how they can invest, negative yields will increase costs and potentially require employers to provide a cash top-up.

"This may be the last thing the sponsor needs, given the current economic situation and the potential difficulty in affording those extra payments," pension fund trustee Vassos Vassou of Dalriada Trustees said. —Reuters

## Germany agrees on rescue package for Lufthansa



In this file photo, planes of the German airline Lufthansa are parked at the "Franz-Josef-Strauss" airport in Munich, southern Germany. —AFP

**BERLIN:** The German government has agreed on final details of a rescue package for struggling airline carrier Lufthansa, Der Spiegel magazine reported on Wednesday.

Lufthansa is seeking to tap Germany's economic stabilization fund to help it weather the coronavirus pandemic and what is expected to be a protracted travel slump. The ministers in charge put the finishing touches on the bailout package and a government official was on his way to Frankfurt to seal the deal with airline managers, the magazine reported. The German finance ministry and the economy ministry both declined to comment. A Lufthansa spokesperson also denied any statement on the media report.

The airline said on May 7 that it was negotiating a 9 billion euro bailout with the German government to ensure its future, confirming an earlier Reuters report. Lufthansa said then that the package included a non-voting capital component, known as a so-called silent participation, a secured loan, and a capital increase which may leave the government with a shareholding of up to 25 percent plus one share. —Reuters

## Coronavirus cyber crimes pose big risk

By Werno Gevers

**S**ecurity professionals across the Middle East must educate employees about the rise in coronavirus-related cybercrime and how to avoid placing their organization at risk, says Werno Gevers at Mimecast.

Organizations are already facing business challenges in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, and a rapid rise in COVID-19 related cyberattacks is causing additional stress. A new report from the Mimecast Threat Intelligence Centre, entitled 100 Days of Coronavirus, tracks cybercrime activity since the start of the outbreak. It found that between January and March 2020, global monthly volumes of spam and opportunistic cybercrime detections increased by 26.3 percent, impersonation fraud detections increased by 30.3 percent, malware detections increased by 35.16 percent and the blocking of URL clicks increased by 55.8 percent. In addition, over 115,000 COVID-19 related spoof domains, designed to steal personal information, were detected over the three-month period.

Focusing on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), the Threat Intelligence team saw notable increases in malware (22 percent) and spam (36 percent) during February and March, when the virus started spreading in the region. Shockingly, there was a 751 percent increase in unsafe clicks during the first three months of year – likely as a result of a rise in human error caused by stress, unusual working environments and our desire to stay informed.



### Cybercriminals feed on people's fears

Phishing scams often tap into whatever is currently making headlines. Thankfully employees' awareness of cybersecurity continues to grow, but criminals are making the most of the current situation by feeding on people's fears and anxiety. In short, people just aren't thinking straight. We're also getting used to receiving emails from employers, authorities and just about every brand we've ever interacted with, about their response to COVID-19. Bad actors know this and are impersonating these organizations with the aim of getting concerned citizens to click on malicious links.

Between March 9th and 20th alone, we saw a 234 percent increase in daily registrations of new coronavirus-related web domains and sub-domains, at more than 6,100 a day. While some of these 60,000+ sites were legitimate, the majority weren't. Links were used to capture credentials, allowing bad actors to access networks, or to directly infect them with malware.

### Evolving threats

As the pandemic and the response to it has evolved, so have cybercriminals' strategies and attacks. The scams change to match what people are talking about.

Many of the first phishing attacks impersonated specialists from Wuhan, China. Criminals then masqueraded as regional authorities and later businesses communicating with their employees.

In the Middle East, many businesses and authorities have had to warn customers and residents of fake emails being sent out in their name. Some regional airlines, shared warnings about malicious emails offering them refunds on cancelled flights. On our own grid, our Threat Intelligence team discovered a phishing scam offering an immediate air ticket refund in exchange for credit card details.

The Central Bank of UAE released an announcement at the end of March, saying, "Fraudsters always look for opportunities to target consumers and as the public is engaged with COVID-19 pandemic news, they are using different tactics to increase fraudulent activities on banking customers."

Note: Werno Gevers is cybersecurity specialist at Mimecast



## Business

## KAMCO GCC Fixed Market Update

# GCC financing needs likely to balloon in the near-term

## Gulf bonds and sukuk refinancing to be around \$300bn in next 5 years

**KUWAIT:** The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and its economic impact on the countries across the globe has resulted in a reassessment of financial impact in light of new financial stress and the near-term uncertainty. Governments have earmarked financial stimulus packages in varying amounts which is as high as 21 percent of GDP in the case of Japan followed by the US at 13 percent of the GDP or \$2.7 trillion. As we write this report, the number of Covid-19 cases reached 4.7 million, but there were also news of reopening of economies like China and Germany aimed at kickstarting economic recovery, along with plugging the hole made by spending in stimulus packages.

The crisis comes at a time when global debt remains at historically high levels which is further expected to increase, led by bond-sponsored spending as countries deal with the pandemic. According to a Bloomberg report, in the emerging markets, around \$730 billion is due through the rest of this year but with dwindling foreign reserves and low economic growth rates, it would become harder for some economies to maintain their external debt payments.

The pandemic has choked new funding in the equity market space with new primary market issuances now taking a back seat awaiting better valuations in addition to the historic outflow of funds from the emerging markets. On the fixed income side, it has led to record low benchmark rates implemented in order to infuse liquidity in the system. However, the risk assessment of the once low-returns-safe-bet of the fixed income market has also changed.

The fiscal pressure from the decline in economic activity and lower oil revenues has forced GCC governments to issue sizeable debt. GCC governments have issued close to \$31 billion in bonds in YTD-2020 with \$24 billion in April-2020 alone and more than \$10 billion in sukuk. Last year, the bond issuances by governments in the region totaled \$48.8 billion while sukuk issued were at \$33.3 billion. On the other hand, corporate issuances have been active with \$19.0 billion in bond issuances this year, including \$6.6 billion in May-2020, whereas sukuk issuances stood at \$4.8 billion. This compares to last year's \$45.6 billion bonds and 14.8 billion in sukuk. Furthermore, bond/sukuk maturities this year stands at \$38.7 billion for the GCC

issuers. Combined this with estimated deficits of more than \$150 billion for the year, fixed income issuances could overtake last year's levels in 2020.

### Rating actions

The pandemic has resulted in almost 36 sovereign downgrades by the three rating agencies and numerous corporate downgrades, thus raising the cost of funding. However, an analysis from Fitch rating shows that despite that record number of sovereign downgrades, the number of debts that were downgraded were not at a historically high volume. The agency downgraded 22 sovereigns which forms 18 percent of its portfolio but the dollar value of debt that was affected due to the downgraded accounted for around 10 percent or \$7.4 trillion of global government debt outstanding. This was because of the higher number of lower-rated emerging markets being downgraded as compared to developed markets.

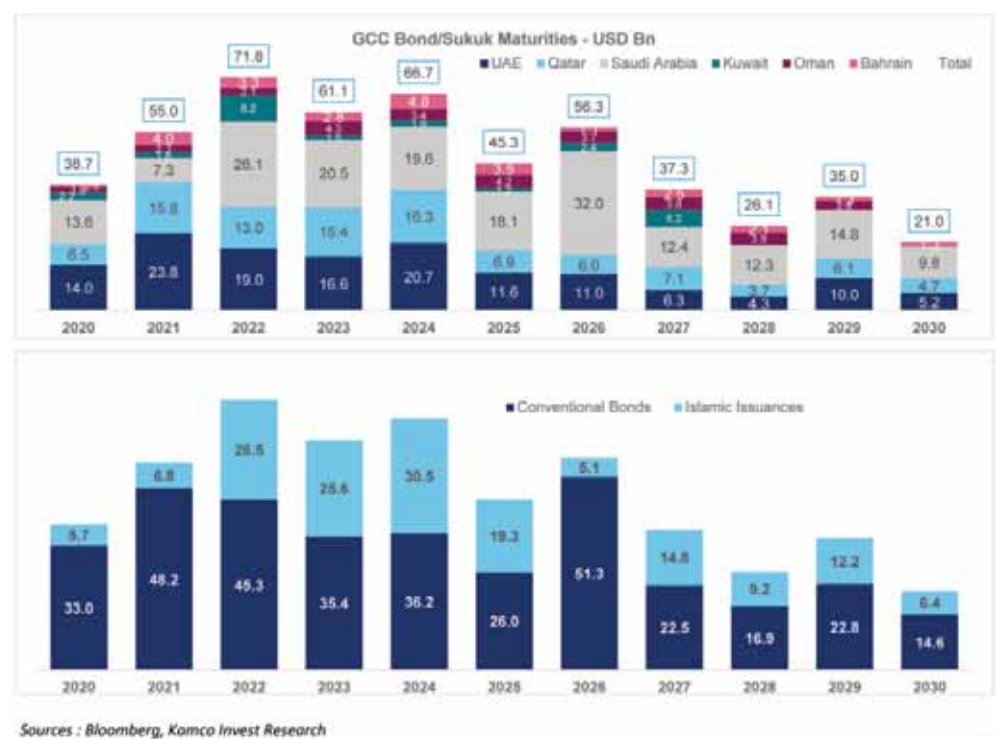
In terms of ratings action in the GCC, YTD-2020 downgrades included that of Kuwait and Oman by one notch by S&P triggered by fiscal pressure due to the fall in oil prices as these

### Oil price fall forces govts to issue debt

countries heavily depend on oil revenues to meet their budgeted spending. The downgrade was based on an oil price expectation of \$30/d for 2020 which we believe is too low and does not take into account the expected demand revival during the second half of the year. In addition, with one of the lowest debt-to-GDP ratio and faring largely better than its neighbors in other metrics like external debt and fiscal balance, Kuwait is least vulnerable to the current pressure on the economic front. In case of Saudi Arabia, public debt is low at 23 percent of GDP in 2019 as compared to the average emerging market 53 percent. However, the ratio have been rising in recent years and with the additional spending related to Covid-19, budget deficits are expected to widen and debt ratios expected to worsen.

### Bond/sukuk maturities

GCC governments are seeing \$140.9 billion in fixed income maturities over the next five years whereas corporate maturities stand at \$152.4 billion. A majority of these maturities are in dollar followed by local currency is-



suances in SAR and QAR. In addition, due to the credit rating profile of the GCC governments, a majority of these maturities are in the high investment grade or A rated instruments. In terms of type of instruments, conventional bonds dominate with almost \$200 billion in maturities over the next five year whereas sukuk maturities are expected to increase starting from 2022.

In terms of sector maturities, Banks and other Financial Services sector have \$91 billion in maturities in the next five years, accounting for around 31 percent of the total outstanding until 2024. The Energy and Real Estate sector maturities were next at \$12 billion each or a total 8 percent of total maturities until 2024. Banks in UAE have the biggest maturities over the next five years at \$45 billion followed by Qatar at \$20.8 billion, totaling 22.4 percent of total bond/sukuk maturities over the next five years in the GCC. Real Estate maturities are also concentrated in UAE and Qatar at \$5.9 billion and \$3.5 billion, respectively, until 2024. These issuances were aimed at both new funding needs as well as refinancing needs. GCC bonds and sukuk refinancing stands at close to \$300 billion in the next five years, and out of this nearly two third are bonds and the remaining one third or \$95.1 billion are maturities of sukuk. In terms of country split, UAE has the biggest upcom-

ing maturities at \$94.1 billion followed by Saudi Arabia and Qatari government and corporates at \$87.1 billion and \$67.0 billion. Loan maturities in the GCC region is also almost at the same level over the next five years as bonds and sukuk at \$302.9 billion. Around \$72 billion in loans are due in the rest of 2020 with UAE companies owing around 46 percent or \$32.8 billion by the end of 2020.

### Outlook

We expect GCC bond and sukuk issuances to once again grow this year backed both budget refinancing needs, as well as new funding requirements. The onset of the Covid-19 has resulted in additional needs for both corporate and government entities which should support primary market issuances for the rest of the year and in the near term. In addition, with four out of the six GCC countries having comfortable investment grade ratings and the assumed support from the group to Oman and Bahrain, we believe this should support raising funds in the region as well as internationally. Moreover, the sizable sovereign wealth funds for a majority of the sovereigns in the region support the overall credit ratings profile which supports raising funds without any shortfall. For instance, Abu Dhabi's \$7 billion bond earlier this month attracted orders of more than \$25 billion.



## Sports

# England's Lee Westwood says fans 'essential' to Ryder Cup

## Shutdown has played havoc with Cup qualifying

**NEW YORK:** England's Lee Westwood, in line to play in his 11th Ryder Cup, says spectators are "essential" to the US-Europe golf showdown despite the possibility of empty stands due to COVID-19.

Westwood, a vice captain two years ago when Europe won the trophy in France, told The Golf Channel he cannot see staging the event without the emotional responses spectators bring to the rivalry.

"I just don't see somebody holing the winning putt, from either side, on the 18th green or wherever it may be, turning to an empty stand, raising his hands in the air and it feeling the same," Westwood said in a Wednesday posting on the network website. "It's never going to feel the same, with what's going on, but if any tournament needs fans, it's that tournament. Just for me, the fans are essential for the Ryder Cup."

The 43rd Ryder Cup remains scheduled for September 25-27 at Whistling Straits in Kohler, Wisconsin, and no decisions about spectators have been announced in a season that has seen golf shut down by the coronavirus pandemic.

In a rearranged global schedule, the British Open was cancelled and three majors in the United States moved to later in the year. World number one Rory McIlroy of Northern Ireland and US star Brooks Koepka, ranked third, also questioned staging a Ryder Cup without fans, as the first four US PGA Tour return events are set to have next month.

A Ryder Cup postponement to 2021 "may be needed" rather than playing without spectators, Westwood said. The Englishman played for seven Cup winners in 10 playing appearances, earning 23 points with a best of 4.5 in a 2004 winning effort.

The shutdown has played havoc with Cup qualifying, although Westwood is on the current list for European captain Padraig Harrington after a January European Tour triumph at Abu Dhabi. "We might have to modify it a little bit," Westwood said of the team roster selection process. "I think Padraig is pleased with the way the team's shaping up, and the way that qualifying has gone."

"But at the same point, there are people on the outside that would have been some of the favorites to get in there. It's a difficult one."

European fans could have a tough time attending the Ryder Cup if two-week US entry quarantines remain in place.

With another 14-day isolation awaiting Westwood on his return to England, the 47-year-old isn't planning a trip over to compete right away even with the European Tour off until at least late July. His top-50 status would allow him into the next two US PGA Tour events.

"It's six weeks for two tournaments, and to me that's just not worth it," Westwood said. "It's not worth taking the risk if everybody thinks that those kind of precautions have got to be in place. I don't feel like golf's a priority if it's that



**FLORIDA:** File photo shows Lee Westwood of England plays his shot from the seventh tee during the final round of the Honda Classic at PGA National Resort and Spa Champion course on March 1, 2020 in Palm Beach Gardens. — AFP

severe." Westwood, a 12-time top-five finisher in majors without a victory, is set to host the European Tour's British Masters July 30-August 2.

If the quarantine is still in place and events are played as planned, he would miss the PGA Championship, set for the following week at TPC Harding Park in San Francisco.

"It's a tough situation. We can't afford anything to go wrong and this virus to spread any more than it has done," Westwood said. "People want something to watch, and it's a good way to kick-start your economy, but also we don't want a second wave (of the virus), so we have to make sure we're very, very safe." —AFP

## Fitness a priority for champ Mansour during Ramadan

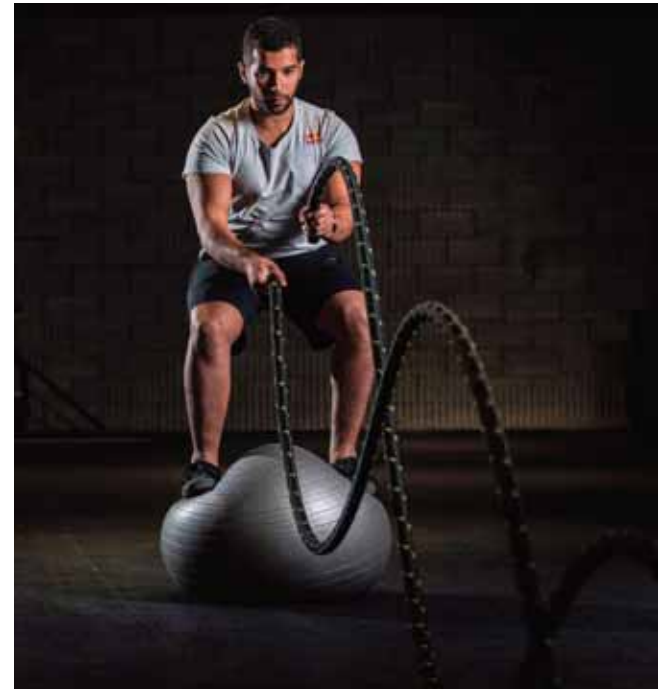
**KUWAIT:** The aspirations of athlete Mansour Al Safran is upheld by his continuing dedication to his fitness goals. And he fully believes that in Ramadan it is ever more important to meet these goals, no matter what the external circumstances may be.

He is no different from others who train for a purpose. The universal challenge remains overcoming unavoidable factors. "This year, Ramadan is different for all of us," said Mansour Al Safran. "We have to adapt not only when it comes to our fitness, but to other goals as well."

Al Safran also stressed the importance of a clean and balanced diet. During iftar, Mansour doesn't use the occasion as a reason to feast. "I'll have something light at first," said Al Safran. "After the second workout I'll have a bigger meal, once I've hydrated properly." After a long day of fasting and working out, he doesn't want to overload his body with food and drink.

His full Ramadan schedule on a training day has him workout before iftar, usually with some cardio exercises. He does this for an hour and breaks his fast. After a few hours he does a second workout, where he focuses on mobility training, and has his big meal of the day.

"Since I am not able to ride my BMX as much as I used to," said Al Safran. "I supplement with the kinds of workouts I can do at home." He eats plenty of fruits and is sustained by a low-carb diet. Mansour Al Safran is a BMX champion. He lives and trains in Kuwait. To find out more about Mansour Al Safran, visit @mansouralsafraan on Instagram





## Sports

# Oh-and-Sixers: 76ers remain winless in NBA 2K tourney

## NBA to issue guidelines in June on recalling players

**LOS ANGELES:** Last season, 76ers GC won the NBA 2K League Tipoff tournament, went 11-5 in the regular season and got to the year-ending finals. The 2020 season, however, is proving much trickier to navigate.

The 76ers were swept in a two-game series by the expansion Gen.G Tigers of Shanghai on Wednesday, falling to 0-6 on the year. In other Wednesday action as part of Week 3, Hornets Venom GT rallied past the previously unbeaten Mavs Gaming 2-1, and the defending champion T-Wolves Gaming swept Pistons GT 2-0.

Originally scheduled to begin its season March 24, the NBA 2K League postponed play due to the coronavirus pandemic. On April 27, the league announced an initial six-week, online-only schedule, with all 23 teams playing eight total matches from their home markets. Action finally began May 5.

Each match is a best-of-three, with the outcome of each three-game series counting as one win or one loss in the standings. The Tigers opened play Wednesday with an 81-67 win thanks to 40 points, nine assists and six steals from Dhwon "ShiftyKaii" White plus 16 points and nine rebounds from Brian "Killey" Diaz. Alexander "Steez" Bernstein paced the 76ers with 22 points and 16 boards.

Gen.G completed the sweep with a 67-58 victory, getting 41 points and eight assists from ShiftyKaii. Killey grabbed 17 rebounds. Ethan "Radiant" White led the 76ers with 37 points.

Gen.G improved to 2-2 in its inaugural season. "We've been in a lot of close games, with

the Warriors, the Kings, but we just didn't close 'em out," ShiftyKaii said. "That's one of our problems that we're working on, closing out games. But once we figure that out, I think we'll be top 10. ...

"I'm playing with great teammates. ... All my teammates make it easier for me." The Hornets dropped their first game to the Mavs 72-64 before bouncing back for 67-57 and 68-64 wins. In the opener, the Mavs got 19 points from Justin "Sherm" Sherman, 18 points from Joshua "Spartxn" McHatten and 18 points, 16 rebounds and seven assists from Peter "PeteBeBallin" Malin. The Hornets' Justin "Snubby" Stemerman scored a game-high 26 points.

Snubby's 18 points led a balanced Hornets attack in the second game. Sherm scored 18 for the Mavs, and PeteBeBallin had 19 points and 15 rebounds. The Hornets rode Snubby's 28 points and Zaeya "Zae" Ishak's 19 points to a victory in the series finale. Artreyo "Dimez" Boyd topped the Mavs with 28 points in the loss.

The T-Wolves began with a 67-54 win over the Pistons behind 31 points from Michael "BearDaBeast" Key plus 16 points and 14 rebounds from Mihad "FEAST" Feratovic. The Pistons' Johnathon "Demon JT" Fields scored 17 points. The second game was a 79-69 victory for the T-Wolves. BearDaBeast poured in 39 points, and FEAST contributed 10 points and 12 boards. Devin "DevGoss" Gossett led the Pistons with 23 points, and Demon JT added 21 points and 10 assists.

Meanwhile, NBA teams expect the league of-



**DETROIT:** File photo shows Josh Richardson #0 of the Philadelphia 76ers shoots the ball against the Detroit Pistons at Little Caesars Arena in Detroit, Michigan. — AFP

fice to issue guidelines around June 1 allowing teams to begin recalling far-flung players in anticipation of resuming the coronavirus-disrupted season, ESPN reported Wednesday. The US sports

broadcaster said teams expect to be told about the same time when they can expand individual workouts — already underway at some clubs — to include more team personnel.—Agencies

## Lauda with me 'in spirit at every race': Hamilton

**LONDON:** Lewis Hamilton said Niki Lauda is with him "in spirit at every race" as the six-time world champion hailed the Austrian F1 legend on the first anniversary of his death. Three-time champion Lauda passed away just before last year's Monaco Grand Prix at the age of 70. As well as his battles on and off the track, Lauda played a key role in persuading Hamilton to leave McLaren for Mercedes seven years ago.

"With Niki, bringing me to a team, convincing me to come to a team that at the time had a lot of success to come. I am grateful for the opportunity and forever love Niki," said Hamilton.

"I know he is with us every race in spirit," Hamilton, speaking in a video tribute released by the world champions on Wednesday, admitted it was still tough to discuss the impact of Lauda, 12 months after his death.

"Niki is someone who I miss and who I think we all miss dearly," said the British driver. "Probably the most

fond memories I have are from my first conversations. We started talking some time in 2012 and I just remember being home during the day, having a call from Niki and he is trying to convince me to come to the team. "It was very cool to have a call from a world champion and an icon like Niki."

Meanwhile, Denny Hamlin won the rain-shortened Toyota 500 at Darlington Raceway on Wednesday for the Joe Gibbs Racing driver's second victory of the season in the 2020 NASCAR Cup Series.

The 39-year-old was leading the field in the first Cup race on a Wednesday since 1984 when the rain came down with just under 25 laps to go in the 228-lap event.

Drivers were told to enter the pit lane with 20 laps to go before NASCAR announced the decision to end the race.

"I was pretty happy with how it all turned out," Hamlin, who also won the season-opening Daytona 500 in February, said. "I've got my happy face on, made sure I brought it with me today," he added, referring to his face mask which depicted a big smile.

Hamlin's 39th career win and third at the venue came with an element of fortune as he was running on worn tyres before the rain disruption as the team had run out of fresh ones. "It's a driver's race track. You can move around. You can do different things to make your car handle," Hamlin said. "We got it right today."—Agencies

## England bowlers lead the way as cricketers resume training

**LONDON:** England bowlers are set to report for training yesterday, leading the way as cricket chiefs step up plans to start a season heavily delayed by the coronavirus pandemic. The global health crisis has put matches on hold in England until July 1 at the earliest while in other countries the season is already over.

Despite the pandemic, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) is still planning to stage a full home international programme, starting with a three-Test series against the West Indies, which was originally scheduled for June.

The ECB has announced that up to 18 bowlers will be involved from yesterday. Edgbaston, Hove, Old Trafford, the Oval, the Riverside, Taunton and Trent Bridge will stage at least one session, before batsmen and wicketkeepers become involved from June 1. The bowlers' identities have yet to be made public but the choice of venues indicates that James Anderson (Old Trafford) and Stuart Broad (Trent Bridge) will be among the leading England bowlers training at their home county grounds.

Bowlers will have to bring their own kit, including designated cricket balls, wash their hands regularly, and clean any equipment used with disinfectant wipes. England managing director Ashley Giles said last week he wanted the training sessions to be safer than a trip to a supermarket.—AFP



## Sports

# 'Insensitive' Japan Olympic virus logo pulled after row

## Bach says Games would be cancelled if not held in 2021

**TOKYO:** A satirical mock-up depicting the Tokyo Olympics logo as the new coronavirus has been pulled after Olympic organisers branded it "insensitive" and said it infringed copyright.

The design combines the distinctive, spiky image of the coronavirus cell with the blue-and-white Tokyo 2020 logo, and appeared on the front page of an in-house magazine published by the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan (FCCJ).

The Tokyo 2020 Olympics have been postponed until next year because of the coronavirus, which has killed hundreds of thousands of people and halted sport worldwide.

FCCJ president Khalid Azhari said yesterday the club had decided to withdraw the image and remove it from its website after advice that its legal defence against a potential copyright breach was "not strong".

"More importantly, we are all in this coronavirus crisis together and clearly the cover offended some people in our host country Japan," said Azhari, voicing "sincere regret".

Tokyo 2020 chief executive Toshiro Muto hailed the move, telling reporters: "We believe their response was appropriate and this is what we were hoping for as an outcome."

Speaking to reporters on Monday, Tokyo 2020's chief spokesman Masa Takaya had blasted the emblem as "very disappointing".

He said it was also an infringement of the copyright owned by Tokyo 2020, and revealed that top Olympic bosses had requested that the FCCJ remove the image.

"I also have to say this is insensitive to many people being affected by this damaging and painful situation," said Takaya.

"It is especially insensitive to athletes who are willing to compete in the Tokyo 2020 Games next year and working very hard every day for next year's Games."

Although the circulation of the magazine is tiny, this is not the first time Tokyo 2020 has become embroiled in a dispute over its

logo. It was forced to scrap its original emblem after claims of plagiarism from a Belgian designer, who said it was "virtually identical" to his logo for a theatre in Liege, eastern Belgium.

Tokyo 2020 organisers are facing the giant task of reorganising the Olympics for next year after IOC president Thomas Bach and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe decided to postpone the Games by a year.

The postponement, announced on March 24, coincided with the beginning of a spike in coronavirus cases in Tokyo and throughout Japan. After several weeks under a state of emergency during which residents have been urged to stay at home, Tokyo is now seeing only a handful of new coronavirus cases per day.

Earlier, International Olympic Committee (IOC) chief Thomas Bach says the Tokyo Games would have to be scrapped if the event cannot be held next year due to the COVID-19 crisis.

In March, the IOC and Japanese government took the unprecedented decision to delay the Games, which had been due to start in July, for a year due to the novel coronavirus outbreak.

However, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has said the multi-sports event cannot take place in 2021 unless the virus is contained and Bach said he understood his position.

The novel coronavirus has infected more than 17,100 people in Japan, causing 797 deaths.

"Quite frankly, I have some understanding for this, because you can't forever employ 3,000 or 5,000 people in an Organising Committee," Bach told the BBC.

"You can't every year change the entire sports schedule worldwide of all the major federations. You can't have the athletes being in uncertainty."

Bach said the IOC was committed to holding the Games next year though it had to be prepared for various scenarios including quarantining athletes.

"What could this mean for the life in an Olympic Village?"

However, he "violated several duties of office" by meeting Infantino on three occasions in 2016 and 2017.

"On several occasions, Mr. Lauber did not speak the truth, acted unfairly, violated the code of conduct and obstructed the investigation," argued the monitoring authority.

Lauber has staunchly defended himself.

"The fundamental principles of the rule of law are being thrown overboard," said Lauber, in his appeal to the Administrative Court at the end of April, and reported on Saturday by sections of the Swiss media.

He accused the members of the judicial commission of being "biased" and of demonstrating "a bias" against him.

Lauber said they were dealing "in speculation and (had) a constant disregard for all the facts and extenuating circumstances." FIFA has never denied the meetings between Infantino and Lauber, explaining that they were intended to show that the international football federation, which has the status of complainant in certain procedures, was "ready to collaborate with Swiss justice".

But the legal vagueness in which these meetings took place has raised questions. Meanwhile, UEFA President Aleksander Ceferin is aiming to finish this year's Champions League by the end of August as football in Europe slowly starts to bounce back from the coronavirus pandemic.

"Our plan is to finish it between now and the end of August," Ceferin said in an interview with Portuguese sports daily Record, published on Wednesday.—Agencies



**TOKYO:** This photo illustration taken on May 21, 2020 in Tokyo shows the cover design of Number 1 Shimbun, the monthly magazine for members of the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan. A satirical mock-up depicting the Tokyo Olympics logo as the new coronavirus has been pulled after Olympic organisers branded it "insensitive" and said it infringed copyright. —AFP

he said. "All these different scenarios are under consideration and this is why I'm saying it's a mammoth task, because there are so many different options that it's not easy to address them (now). "When we have a clear view on how the world will look on July 23, 2021, then (we will) take the appropriate decisions." —Agencies

## Swiss legal chief faces sack over Infantino meetings

**BERN:** A Swiss parliamentary commission on Wednesday decided to open proceedings that could see the country's attorney-general dismissed as part of an investigation over a number of alleged secret meetings with FIFA president Gianni Infantino. The commission voted by 13 votes to four to initiate a case against Michael Lauber. It is "due to a well-founded suspicion of serious violation of the duties of office either intentionally or by gross negligence", explained the president of the commission, Andrea Caroni.

If, at the end of the procedure, the commission finds that the suspicions are confirmed, it will submit a proposal for dismissal to parliament who will decide on the sacking.

Otherwise, the procedure will be closed, the commission said in a statement.

Lauber came out of the building, where Wednesday's proceedings were held in private, simply declaring: "It went very well". According to the report, Lauber, 54, was in charge of matters related to the notorious corruption scandal at FIFA.

## Watford's Mariappa tests positive for virus

**LONDON:** Watford defender Adrian Mariappa said news that he had tested positive for coronavirus came as a "big surprise" as he has felt no ill effects. The 33-year-old was one of three positive tests at Watford with the other two among staff members. The Hornets accounted for half the six COVID-19 cases detected from 748 tests of Premier League players and staff ahead of a return to training in small groups this week.

"Ever since I got my positive result back on Tuesday, I've been scratching my head to try to work out how I might have got coronavirus," Mariappa told The Telegraph.

"It was a big surprise because I haven't really left the house, apart from some exercise and the odd walk with the kids. I've mainly just been home-schooling and keeping fit." Mariappa had been following a fitness programme prepared by the club without any trouble caused by the virus to his breathing. "I've not had any symptoms and I've felt as fit as ever, probably fitter because I've been working really hard.

"I've been following my training programme and I've not felt out of breath or ill, or anything. "We've been fully monitored the whole time and the club have been able to track our distances and things. I've been really excelling in all of that and feeling great."

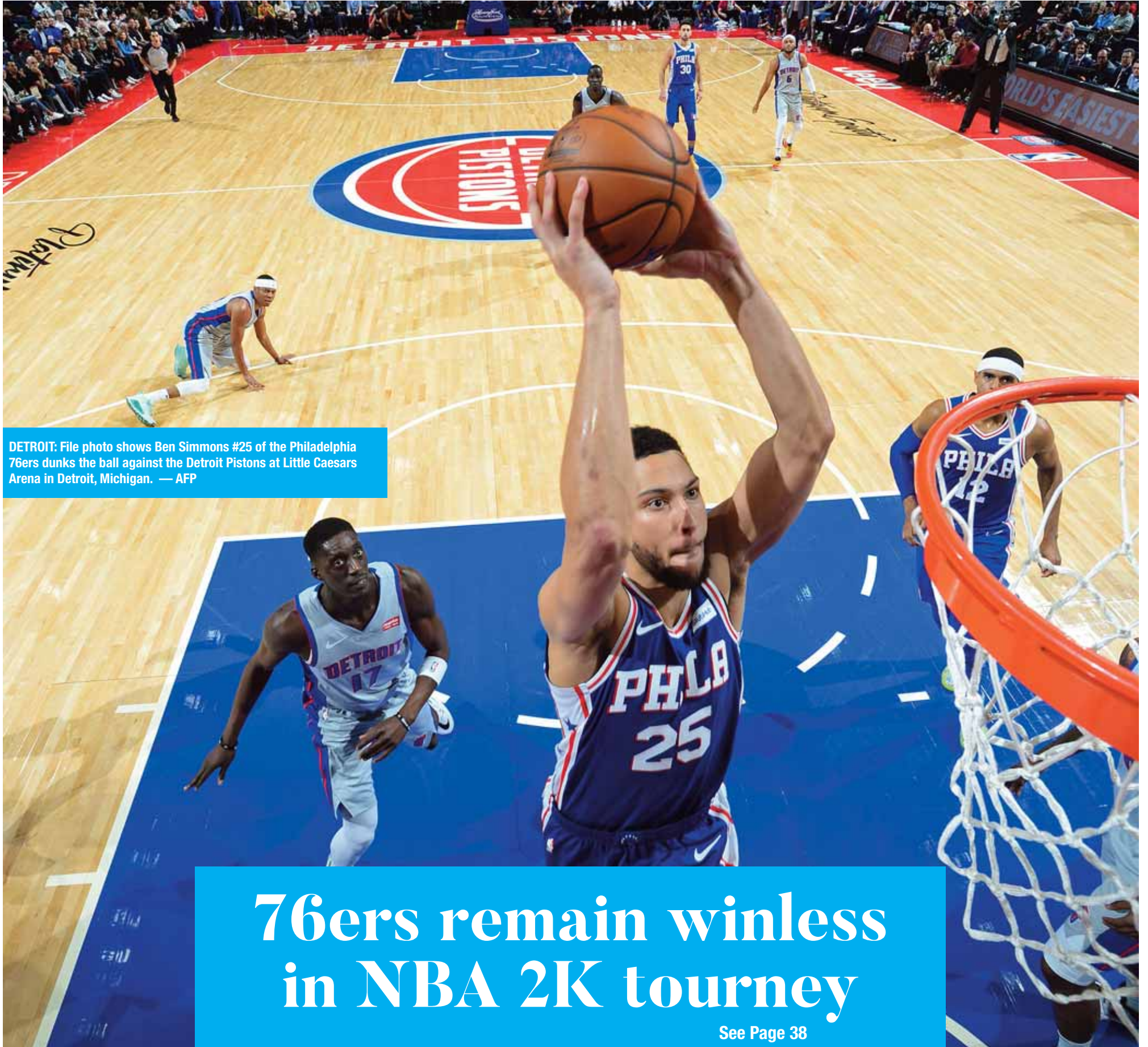
Burnley confirmed their assistant manager Ian Woan is also asymptomatic having tested positive for the virus.—AFP



# Sport Times

www.kuwaittimes.net

FRIDAY, MAY 22, 2020



DETROIT: File photo shows Ben Simmons #25 of the Philadelphia 76ers dunks the ball against the Detroit Pistons at Little Caesars Arena in Detroit, Michigan. — AFP

## 76ers remain winless in NBA 2K tourney

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