



NOTICE

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Eid

MUBARAK



Latam new virus epicenter; Trump seeks US reopening

Donated plasma benefits COVID-19 patients • Remdesivir effective against virus

WASHINGTON: The World Health Organization declared Latin America “a new epicenter” of the coronavirus pandemic as US President Donald Trump ramped up pressure on state and local governments to speed up the reopening of the reeling American economy. Surges in infections across much of Central and South America have driven the global case count to nearly 5.2 million, with more than 337,000 deaths, even as hard-hit Europe and the United States cautiously move into a recovery phase.

The death toll in Brazil has soared past 20,000, and with 310,000 reported cases, it has the third-biggest caseload in the world behind the United States and Russia. “In a sense, South America has become a new epicenter for the disease,” WHO emergencies director Mike Ryan said on Friday. “We’ve seen many South American countries with increasing numbers of cases... but certainly the most affected is Brazil at this point.”

Unlike in Europe and the United States, where the elderly were hardest-hit, a significant number of deaths in Brazil have been younger people, who are often driven by poverty to work despite the threat of infection. “Since Brazil has a younger population, it’s normal for the number of cases to be higher among under-60s,” said Mauro Sanchez, an epidemiologist at the University of Brasilia. “What’s perverse is that a lot of the people who are exposing themselves to the virus are doing it because they don’t have a choice.”

As the toll mounted, gravediggers at a cemetery outside Sao Paulo scrambled to keep up. “We’ve been working 12-hour days, burying them one after the other,” said one worker at Vila Formosa, wearing a white protective suit, mask and face shield. “It doesn’t stop.”

In Washington, Trump, keen to find a way out of the crisis and facing an uphill re-election battle,

ramped up pressure on state and local governments to ease lockdown measures. The pandemic has hammered the American economy and led to calls for an end to virus restrictions, despite the COVID-19 numbers still rising in the United States – the worst-hit country in the world with 1.6 million infections and 96,000 deaths.

Trump demanded state governors classify churches, synagogues and mosques as “essential services” on the same level as food and drug stores, and immediately allow them to hold services despite curbs on public gatherings. “The governors need to do the right thing and allow these very important essential places of faith to open right now, for this weekend,” said the president, who counts religious conservatives as a core of his electoral base.

“If they don’t do it, I will override the governors. In America, we need more prayer, not less,” added Trump, who has previously expressed support for

street protests against lockdowns. It was not clear whether he had any authority to override the governors. There was pushback from the mayor of Los Angeles after the Trump administration warned that the continued lockdown in the city could be illegal. “We are not guided by politics in this – we are guided by science, we are guided by collaboration,” said Mayor Eric Garcetti.

In the latest step to restart the economy, the Trump administration said Friday it would exempt from entry bans foreign professional athletes competing in the top leagues for several sports, including basketball, tennis and golf. “In today’s environment, Americans need their sports,” Chad Wolf, acting secretary of the Homeland Security department, said in a statement announcing the order. “It’s time to reopen the economy and it’s time we get our professional athletes back to work.”

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Survivor recalls horror of crash that killed 97

KARACHI: One of the two people to survive a plane crash in Pakistan that killed 97 people has described jumping from the burning wreckage of the aircraft after it hurtled into a residential neighborhood. The Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) plane came down among houses on Friday afternoon after both engines failed as it approached Karachi airport, the airline said.

Its wings sliced through rooftops, sending flames and plumes of smoke into the air as it crashed onto a street, sparking a rescue operation that lasted into the night. Commercial flights in the country resumed only days ago, ahead of the holiday of Eid al-Fitr, after planes were grounded during a lockdown over the coronavirus pandemic.

“After it hit and I regained consciousness, I saw fire everywhere and no one was visible,” Mohammad Zubair, 24, said from his hospital bed in a video clip circulated on social media. “There were cries of children, adults and elderly. The cries were everywhere and everybody was trying to survive. I

undid my seat belt and I saw some light and tried to walk towards it. Then I jumped out.”

Zubair had suffered burns but was in a stable condition, a health ministry official said. The airline named the other survivor as the president of the Bank of Punjab, Zafar Masud. The health ministry for Sindh province, where the southern port city of Karachi is located, yesterday confirmed that all 97 bodies recovered from the crash site had been on the plane. At least 19 had been identified so far, while DNA testing was being carried out at the University of Karachi to help name the rest of the victims. A local hospital earlier reported it had received the bodies of people killed on the ground.

The disaster comes as Pakistanis prepare to celebrate the end of the fasting month of Ramadan and the beginning of Eid, with many travelling to their homes in cities and villages. A PIA spokesperson said air traffic control lost contact with the plane travelling from Lahore to Karachi just after 2:30 pm (0930 GMT). The pilot made a desperate mayday call after announcing “we have lost engines”, according to an audio recording confirmed by the airline.

PIA chief executive Arshad Mahmood Malik described the Airbus A320 as one of the safest planes. “Technically, operationally everything was in place,” he said, promising an investigation.

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KARACHI: Security personnel search for victims in the wreckage of a Pakistan International Airlines aircraft after it crashed in a residential area on Friday. — AFP

Iran slams ‘tumor’ Israel, lauds arms to Palestinians

TEHRAN: Iran’s supreme leader said it was an “Islamic duty” to fight for the “liberation of Palestine” in a landmark speech Friday amid rising tensions with regional arch-enemy Israel. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei denounced Israel as a “tumor” to be removed and hailed Tehran’s supply of arms to Palestinians. He lashed out at Western governments and their Arab “puppets” for supporting the Jewish state, in his first ever address marking Quds (Jerusalem) Day.

The remarks came at the end of a week that saw Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu launch a Twitter tirade against Khamenei and reports that the two sides carried out cyber attacks on each other. Khamenei suggested global attention on the coronavirus crisis had helped obscure wrongs done to Palestinians. “The long-lasting virus of Zionists will be eliminated,” he added.

“The aim of this struggle is the liberation of the entire Palestinian land” and “the return of all Palestinians to their country,” Khamenei said in the speech broadcast live on state television. “The policy of normalizing the presence of the Zionist regime in the region is one of the major policies of the United States of America,” he said.



Ali Khamenei

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Dubai prison: Virtual visits and hearings

DUBAI: Behind a glass, soundproof door, an inmate speaks with someone on a computer screen after visits to the Dubai prison were suspended due to the coronavirus pandemic. In a separate room of the same compound located in the emirate’s desert, about 35 km from the city center, another inmate appeared for a virtual court hearing, while a third was questioned by a prosecutor online.

The use of video conferencing sys-

tems is one of the ways authorities are trying to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 respiratory disease in the prison. “We are trying to eliminate all direct contact with prisoners... heavily depending on modern technology,” Brigadier Ali Al-Shamali, director-general of punitive and correctional institutions, told AFP during a tour of the Al-Awir central prison.

“We can guarantee the health of the inmate, but how can we know whether someone from outside is carrying the virus?” Prisoners in the Dubai jail can now talk to their families using the Skype telecommunications application. Shamali declined to say how many prisoners had caught

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DUBAI: Inmates wearing protective gear read in seats respecting distancing measures amid the COVID-19 pandemic at the library of Dubai’s Al-Awir central prison on May 21, 2020. — AFP

Pak goes wild for blockbuster Turkish drama

ISLAMABAD: Dubbed the Muslim “Game of Thrones”, a drama about the makings of the Ottoman Empire has sent Pakistan wild this Ramadan, smashing television records but exposing the country’s lack of original content. The Turkish-made series has earned praise for its focus on historical figures from the Muslim world who have been framed as role models for Pakistani youths, and the Urdu-language version of the show has racked up more than 240 million views on YouTube alone.

“I prefer to watch it with kids, so they can have real-life superheroes instead of fictional ones,” said Hassam

Mustafa as he settled down at his Islamabad home to watch the series with his nieces and nephews after breaking his fast. Resurrection: Ertugrul has gripped audiences with its daring protagonist, cliffhangers and high production values since it began broadcasting on the first day of the Islamic holy month, which is due to end Sunday or Monday.

Usually state broadcaster PTV fills its Ramadan programming with live charity fundraisers, quiz shows and religious content. But with the virus stifling television studios, Prime Minister Imran Khan issued special instructions to the broadcaster to air the series in a bid to boost Islamic culture and values among young people. “Over here, we go to Hollywood then Bollywood and back again – third-hand culture gets promoted this way,” Khan told a group of YouTubers recently, referring to the influence of foreign shows.

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ISLAMABAD: In this picture taken on May 9, 2020, a family watches Turkish drama series “Dirilis: Ertugrul” telecast on Pakistan’s state-run channel PTV Home during the holy month of Ramadan. — AFP

Ambassador's message

US Ambassador's
Eid Message
to Kuwait

By US Ambassador Alina Romanowski

On behalf of the entire US Embassy community, I extend my best wishes to His Highness the Amir, the Kuwaiti people, and all those celebrating Eid Al-Fitr, ending the period of fasting.

This has been a unique time. A Ramadan unlike any other we have known. Social distancing and the curfew caused us to think of new ways to celebrate this holy month of Ramadan safely.

Religious rituals and family gatherings had to be curtailed, and yet we still found ways to celebrate virtually with our family and friends. I am grateful for the many roundtable discussions I had with our contacts during this holy month and look forward to meeting them all in person.

Despite these new ways of celebrating, the Kuwaiti people have been no less generous in their outpouring of support to those in need, maintaining the real spirit of Ramadan. To all those selfless people, we extend our appreciation for your generosity. Eid Mubarak!

Kuwait Amir praises frontliners in
Eid Al-Fitr address to the public

The world after coronavirus will not be the same as it was: Sheikh Sabah

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Friday addressed the people of Kuwait ahead of the advent of Eid Al-Fitr expressing congratulations to the citizens and residents on the happy occasion. His Highness the Amir began the address, voicing his felicitations on the Eid, expressing good wishes to the Arab and Islamic nations, renewing his gratitude and praise for the Kuwaiti nationals whom he described as heroes for dedicating themselves for service of the homeland and the nationals, employing their sincere efforts for facing the novel coronavirus since its outbreak and start of spreading.

Full devotion

His Highness the Amir expressed deep admiration for all the activists who devoted themselves day and night, namely the medics and health personnel, all personnel serving in various sectors: the ministries of interior and defense, the firemen, the concerned ministries, other state and private authorities, the charitable and cooperative associations who worked devotedly for containing the pandemic. "It is rather necessary that we remember with pride and deep appreciation those who passed away in facing this pandemic and we consider them as martyrs in Heaven," His Highness the Amir said, also expressing deep gratitude to those who got injured, hurt or sick in the combat against the contagion.

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad expressed deep regret for false reports and harmful rhetoric broadcast by the media and social media, that conform neither with sanctity of this revered month nor with the current hard circumstances in the country. Such rhetoric neither serves reforms nor constitutes guidance to raised issues, therefore "I call on everybody to adhere to the ideal media message and be keen on playing a positive and responsible role in supporting joint efforts for annihilating this pandemic."

"This cruel pandemic that broke out in our dear homeland and the whole world should prompt us, as I said on previous occasions, to take lessons for the world of tomorrow after the coronavirus will not be the same as it was before the breakout, for it will leave behind direct and effective repercussions locally and internationally on various aspects of life namely health, economic and social sectors and others," His Highness the Amir said. "The Government and the National Assembly and all active civil associations should take a new approach to face this serious challenges for sake of redrawing the

Amir laments
false reports

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah makes a public address on the occasion of Eid Al-Fitr. — KUNA

future of Kuwait."

Collaboration of efforts

His Highness the Amir, in this context, called for effective steps parallel to the requirements of the current phase and its ramifications; "this can only be attained with cooperation and collaboration of efforts, shouldering the responsibility, depending on ourselves and placing the higher national interest above any other consideration."

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad renewed the gratitude to the citizens and the residents for their understanding of the need for the measures undertaken by the state to face the pandemic, hailing their adherence to health guidance for their safety and wellbeing as well as for the interest of the homeland. "Such conducts of awareness and responsibility will, by His Almighty's will, contribute to speeding up restoration of normal life, which we all aspire to very soon, by His Almighty's will," he said.

"We are certain," His Highness the Amir continued, "His Almighty will make this gloominess cease to exist, by His mercy and grace. We ought to sense the joy and happiness with advent of the

happy Eid, boost the spirit of hope and optimism and spread such spirit among our families and relatives. We pray to His Almighty in these blessed days that he may preserve our dear homeland, take away this pandemic and relieve all mankind of this gloomy plight."

Upcoming changes

His Highness the Amir has affirmed in less than two weeks necessity to foresee the future noting upcoming changes in the world, the parliament speaker said on Friday. Commenting on His Highness the Amir's Eid address, the National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Al-Ghanem said the Amir statement marking the happy Eid focused for the second time during two weeks on the necessity to predict the future, noting that Kuwait appeared facing "existential challenges." His Highness the Amir has called for a new approach, self-reliance, revision and correctness to re-affirm his vision: that mankind world after the coronavirus will not be as it was before it broke out at the health, economic and social levels. He called on all local stakeholders; the government, the parliament and the civil society to foresee the drastic challenges looming on the horizons of the future. The Kuwaiti people will succeed in the upcoming tests, Ghanem affirmed, assuring His Highness the Amir. — KUNA

In My View

Live your life



By Abdellatif Sharaa

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Allow me first to wish you a happy Eid Al-Fitr and may Allah accept your worship and bestow His blessings on you all. I had a feeling that Saturday may be the first day of Eid and the start of the new lunar month, yet technology proved me wrong! Technology in our modern day life is in every major and minor detail, and we have no choice but to accept it.

I saw the following post on Facebook and would like to share it with you. The post starts by saying "Fear will kill you!", then goes on with some sort of a chronicle as follows: They told us on the news in 2001 anthrax will kill you, 2002 West Nile Virus will kill you, 2003 SARS will kill you, 2005 bird flu will kill you, 2006 E coli will kill you, 2008 the financial collapse will kill you, 2009 swine flu will kill you, 2012 the Maya calendar predicts the end of the world, 2013 N Korea will cause WWII, 2014 Ebola will kill you, 2015 Daesh will kill you, 2016 Zika virus will kill you, 2018 Nipah virus will kill you, and 2020 coronavirus will kill you. The fact is that fear will kill you - if you become addicted to this type of news. Stop believing everything on social media, preoccupy yourself with reading and give yourself time for prayers and positive thinking. Do not relinquish your share of this life, be happy and enjoy it. Keep your trust in God strong, because you are going to live as long as God decides, so do not spend your years in fear.

Adopt a healthy way of life - eat healthy food so you can get a potent immune system. Get rid of illusions and worries - you will not live any longer than your age, so do not waste it in fear of losing it. Life has become too fast - the days are going as fast as a soaring rocket into the heavens, so we must be open minded to changes and new developments that we may not be familiar with.

This will definitely affect our way of thinking and affect our psychological behavior, and we must adapt to the environment around us so to enjoy better psychological health. World Health Organization studies revealed that psychological problems increase the risk of getting many physical diseases, and define health as indivisible and a condition of physical perfection.

So, in order to maintain a healthy psychological life, one has to be optimistic and be around optimistic people, while at the same time have self-respect. We should not think about certain matters more than it is necessary. When we go out, we must be easy in dealing with others and behave as ourselves. Physical activity is something effective in having a good mood, including sports and exercise.

These are a few simple steps that help in maintaining peace of mind and a healthy psychological state of mind.

Final Word: "Optimism is essential to achievement and it is also the foundation of courage and true progress."

— Nicholas M Butler

Coronavirus in Kuwait: What we know so far

KUWAIT: Kuwait has recorded 19,564 cases infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) as of Friday, in addition to 138 deaths. With the exception of 180 cases in intensive care, all infected cases are in stable condition and are recovering in quarantined locations designated by the government for this purpose, while thousands have been discharged from quarantine after exhibiting no symptoms during their 14-day quarantine period, the Ministry of Health confirmed. Meanwhile, 5,515 people have recovered completely after previously being infected with the virus, while there are 13,911 people receiving treatment and 2,619 quarantined.

Curfew

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

Precautions

Kuwait halted all commercial flights until further notice, and has sent special flights to repatriate Kuwaitis back home from countries affected with the virus' spread. Kuwait took all measures to test Kuwaitis repatriated from infected areas for potential infection. Kuwait had required all expatriates who arrived from travel on March 1 and beyond to visit Kuwait International Fairground where the Ministry of Health has set up a center to test people for possible infection. Meanwhile, the Cabinet announced on April 9 the operation of all airline flights for expats who are wishing to return back to their countries. Authorities also announced a public holiday in the country from March 12 to May 28,

with work resuming on May 31, while entities providing vital services will remain open. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education has suspended classes for March at all public and private schools (for both students and teaching staffs); first from March 1 to March 12, and later extended it until March 29, before eventually suspending schools until August for grade 12 and October for other stages. State departments have been on high alert to take precautions against the potential spread of the virus. The Ministry of Commerce and Industry has taken measures to make sure that facial masks, hand sanitizers and other goods remain accessible to the public.

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

Hotlines

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

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

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

Medicine delivery

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

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

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

Mental health assistance

The Kuwait Psychological Association (KPA) is providing consultation through the phone for people suffering from the psychological impacts of coronavirus. Different doctors are working on the hotline in different timings as follows:
Dr Rashed Al-Sahl: on Monday and Wednesday 10:00 am - 1:00 pm. Call 9797-6168.
Dr Fahad Al-Tasha: daily from 8:00 pm - 12:00 am. Call 9904-8258.
Dr Othman Al-Asfour: daily 5:00 pm - 8:00 pm. Call 9938-5350.
Dr Mohammed Al-Khalidi (head of this team): daily 9:00 am - 12:00 pm. Call 9903-6470.
Dr Ahmad Al-Khalidi: daily 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm. Call 9910-7965.
Dr Muneera Al-Qattan: Monday and Wednesday 9:00 am - 1:00 pm. Call 9953-3108.
Dr Zainab Al-Saffar: Sunday and Thursday 7:00 pm - 9:00 pm. Call 9954-9908.
Dr Sameera Al-Kandari: Tuesday 9:00 pm - 12:00 am. Call 6770-9434.
Dr Kawthar Al-Yaqout: Monday and Wednesday 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm. Call 5521-0088.
For information and other concerns, call 9401-4283.

Local

Kuwait-based Filipino expats stranded in Georgia for months

The four-day visit is now 75 days and counting

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: At the start of the coronavirus outbreak in Kuwait, three Filipinos left the country for a trip to Georgia from March 8 to March 13. At that time, commercial flights were still operational, although there were many clear indications that Kuwait airport might lock down and foreigners would not be allowed to enter. The trio pushed through anyway with their trip and enjoyed every part of Georgia they visited.

Traveling at the start of the global pandemic seemed to be the craziest thing to do, but they went ahead because the tickets they had booked were non-refundable, they were assured by the airline that they could come back, and they also signed a document at Kuwait airport saying that when they returned, they would be subjected to a 14-day quarantine.

The trio believed they could return just in time, but they were wrong. On March 11, Kuwait announced the closure of Kuwait International Airport from March 13, halting commercial flights. Speaking from Tbilisi through Facebook Messenger, Dan said if only they had been given a sign they couldn't return as planned, probably they would've had changed their minds.

Return in time

"We believed them! We thought we could still catch up, plus the airline reassured us that we could return just in time before the closure of the airport. We believed them even as we were a bit hesitant to fly out of Kuwait," he said. "When we heard about the closure decision, we immediately coordinated with the airline if we could still leave Georgia prior to the lockdown. Again, they said we could complete our vacation and come back, so we did not resched-

ule our vacation," he said.

"Because of the sudden closure of the airport, the airline advised us to leave Tbilisi on March 14 instead of March 13. They said it was due to the changes in the flight schedule of several airlines. They told us to stand by, because we would be allowed to return to Kuwait since we were not citizens of Georgia and had work permits in Kuwait. On March 14, we were allowed to leave Georgia for Kuwait. Our flight had a stopover in Sharjah, but when we landed in Sharjah, we got the bad news that we couldn't proceed to Kuwait, as the country only permitted the entry of Kuwaitis. The airline flew us back to Georgia on the same day," Dan said.

"A very stressful journey - of course we were disappointed. We waited until morning at Tbilisi airport to go back to the city proper and get temporary shelter. Georgian people are very hospitable and understood the situation we were in. They accompanied us to several apartments in the city where we could stay while waiting for the airport

to reopen. We saw some very expensive apartments, but we needed to be very practical and realistic, as we did not know how long we were going to stay in Tbilisi. We selected a very cool but inexpensive apartment in the capital. We are paying only KD 92 per month for a 2-bedroom flat with a wide living room, kitchen and bathroom," Dan said.

"At first we were okay with it since we still had enough money to survive for another week or so. But as the days went by, we were afraid of depleting our savings in the bank, so we decided to look for our consulate in Tbilisi. We found it and reported our predicament to them. They said they will try to do whatever it takes to help us. True enough, after a few days, we received some food packs with groceries good for a month, and they told us if we needed



Food packs given to the group by the Philippines consulate in Tbilisi.

more, they are ready to assist. They said they got the food packs from the Georgian Red Cross. Our prayers every night is for us to be able to leave soon for Kuwait, since we work there and our belongings are all in our apartment. We thought of going back to the Philippines, but even Manila airport is closed, so we only have one choice - to stay and wait until everything normalizes," he said.

75 days

Their vacation of four days is now 75 days and counting. "We are waiting here at the apartment in Tbilisi. We stroll every day - we are allowed to move here. They also have a curfew here, but it starts only after 9 pm and ends at 6 am, so we have lots of free time to visit more places and get to know about Georgia and its people," Dan said.

Tbilisi airport is also closed. "The lockdown here is more relaxed - public transport was only suspended for two weeks. People can come out but they were told to wear facemasks at all times. Now they are back to business - it's normal now, although people are cautious. They continue to observe social distancing too," he said.

"I describe this journey as 'bittersweet'. Bitter because of the unplanned extended vacation, and sweet because we've got to enjoy Georgia for a longer period and gotten to know more about the country and people. We are praying for the normalization of Kuwait and the world. We want to go back to Kuwait and start working; we've learned lessons from this long journey and we hope this would be the end of it. We do not want another lockdown and remain stranded in a foreign land," Dan said.



KUWAIT: A team from the Kuwait Fire Protection Association visited a number of shelters and quarantine sites to inspect fire safety measures and equipment, in order to help government efforts in fighting the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). — By Hanan Al-Saadoun



News in brief

Co-op Eid appointments changed

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Commerce announced that all appointments to co-ops and central markets will be canceled on the first day of Eid Al-Fitr while Tamween (ration supply) branches will be closed for the first two days of Eid. The appointments will be changed to be from 8 am until 12 am. Meanwhile, the ministry of commerce announced that all expired commercial licenses will be extended for six months starting from June 23.

Staff infected

KUWAIT: Mishref Co-op Society announced that 35 out of its 250 employees tested positive for coronavirus. The central market in block 4 was closed and will re-open tomorrow.

Two flights

KUWAIT: Directorate General of Civil Aviation announced that two flights, one to Ghana and another to Qatar, departed from Kuwait International Airport yesterday. A total of 534 passengers are expected to leave the country as of May 23.

Interior workers

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Interior called on its employees who are infected with coronavirus to communicate with the ministry by WhatsApp (65912803) to provide their needs or to follow up with their health condition, affirming that the ministry is keen on the safety of its workers.

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed

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Local

Kuwait's COVID-19 response rapid, comprehensive: WHO

Kuwait's donation helped WHO reach segments in need of health care

KUWAIT: The State of Kuwait's response against COVID-19 has been "decisive, rapid and comprehensive," and succeeded in assessing risks which thus improved ability to address shortcomings, World Health Organization said. Kuwait, since the start of the coronavirus crisis, formed three high-level committees which boosted monitoring system against pandemic, Dr Abdunnasser Abu Baker, Director of Infectious Hazard Management Program at WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, said. Kuwait, he said in an interview, activated pandemic prevention protocol in hospitals which were equipped to deal with disease, in addition to adopting important measures to establish and manage a database system.

Active monitoring

Kuwait, said Abu Baker, also strengthened active monitoring in border crossings, hospitals and clinics. The country collected data of all people coming from infected countries, trained health

workers at frontlines, traced people who came into close contact with infected persons to isolate them in quarantine, as well as isolating and treating infectees, and raising public awareness about virus, he said. Abu Baker expressed gratitude for Kuwait for its donation to WHO to help it fight the pandemic. This donation, he said, "helped us reach the segments in need of health care," operate damaged health facilities and plug funding gap.

Asked about the peak of the coronavirus, Abu Baker said it varied among countries and regions around the world depending on course of virus, how fast countries implemented preventive measures and people's compliance with health instructions. "The curve is

rising in most of the world's countries and we cannot predict the time of the peak," he said. He noted coronavirus infections began relatively late in East of the Mediterranean region but the last week witnessed a surge in cases in 19 countries but slightly dropped in three nations. Abu Baker was asked about a drug or a vaccine against the pandemic and said this process would take between 12-18 months. He said there were around 80 vaccines being tested, six of them in clinical trials.

before having proper conditions that make us feel safe to lifting the measures or easing them gradually," he said. Abu Baker said physical distancing and isolation have proven successful in preventing the spread of the virus within society. The stay-home rule, partial closure of institutions, schools, places of worship and workplace, as well as curfew and lockdown are effective tools against the virus, he said. "Behaviors of individuals have a great role in addressing the pandemic," said Abu Baker.

The WHO official described the Government of Kuwait's repatriation of around 35,000 citizens as "positive" coupled with a set of measures designed to prevent spread of the disease among the returnees. WHO is keen on knowing how countries carry out accurate risk assessments, he said, and "we recommend placing people being repatriated in quarantine," Abu Baker said technology compensated social distancing, promoted awareness over the virus, connected people thus ended the isolation. — KUNA



WHO warns from 'second wave'

Hasty lifting

He, meanwhile, warned against hasty lifting of restrictions in order to avoid a second wave of the virus. "We warn against lifting preventive measures

KRCS provides 115 apartments for nursing staff

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Red Crescent Society (KRCS), Friday, provided 115 apartments with all the basic living needs for nursing staff in the Kuwaiti Ministry of Health in Jaber Al-Ahmad residential area. KRCS Chairman Dr Hilal Al-Sayer said on the sidelines of a visit to the apartments in Jaber Al-Ahmad that residential housing is fully furnished and ready to use by the nursing staff.

Sayer pointed out that this comes as a continuation of the work carried out by the association to help the government agencies to confront the coronavirus pandemic and to support of the ministry of health. He noted that 115 apartments distributed over 23 apartment buildings were furnished with all the basic requirements for living, noting that various food baskets were also provided, which cover the necessary requirements for the nursing staff. Meanwhile, the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Health, Dr Mustafa Redha, praised KRCS efforts and its continuous support in all fields since the beginning of the crisis. — KUNA



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Kuwait, Jordan red crescents launch relief campaign

AMMAN: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) and Jordanian Red Crescent launched a campaign to help more than 2,000 Syrian refugee families and needy families in Jordan. The two-stage campaign, which started at the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan and will end after Eid Al-Fitr holiday, includes the distribution of food boxes on the families, said Mahmoud Assoud, the Jordanian Red Crescent official in charge of the campaign. Assoud said the campaign targetted more than 2,000 Syrian refugee families a number of Jordanian families who were in need of help. The campaign was launched amidst tough economic



and health conditions caused by the spread of the novel coronavirus, thus disrupting income of many families. KRCS, he said, is keen on continuing humanitarian programs in Jordan in collaboration with local partners. — KUNA



Local

Kuwait Heritage



KUWAIT: Children play on simple traditional rides that were set up in public squares such as the Safat Saure. (Source: A total of commemorative printed images to the Ministry of Information in the 1960s and 1970s. Researched by Mohammed Zakaria Abu El-Ella, Researcher in Heritage, the Ministry of Information)

LOYAC does charity despite COVID-19



KUWAIT: LOYAC launched its Ramadan Campaign by contributing in a number of humanitarian initiatives in Kuwait, Lebanon, Yemen and Jordan, during which it managed to carry on with its voluntary, empowering and training programs despite the difficult circumstances as a result of COVID-19 spread.

In this regard, LOYAC's general manager, Al-Bedaiwi said that the curfew posed a new challenge for LOYAC and its institutions, preventing its direct interaction with youth, adding that this challenge prompted LOYAC teams in Kuwait and the Arab world to opt to modern technology to resume their programs online. "For instance, LAPA and LOYAC participated in the 'Art Convoy' initiative in Kuwait by distributing a number of iPads to a huge number of children from families with limited income so that they can log on to special online programs and learn arts, crafts, sports, languages and

story reading taught by voluntary trainers," he explained, noting that more and more volunteers are still filing in their applications through LOYAC website. "LOYAC also opened for volunteers to work with civil defense teams under official supervision in addition to volunteers working with the Kuwait-Saudi Pharmaceutical Industries company," he added.

Further, Bedaiwi noted that LOYAC continued its 'Be Ready' initiative urging youth to make the best use of their time during curfew hours and organized 12 workshops and training courses for 112 young men and women from Kuwait and the Arab world to develop their skills. "In Lebanon, LOYAC volunteers distributed Ramadan aids to 130 needy families in Saïda and those in Al-Fa'our camp in the Beqa' area while taking all preventive measures to protect them from COVID-19. The same was done with 70 families in three Yemeni governorates," Bedaiwi said.

das," Saeed added. Responding to a question about a Tweet she made criticizing what she described as community brainwashing concerning normalization with Israel through some drama works and series, Saeed expressed amazement about producing more than a series advocating the idea. "There is a huge difference between political normalization such as the case with Egypt and drama and social normalization," she underlined.

Saqaf also commented that Syrian actress Solaf Fawakherji had once played the role of a Jewish woman living in Damascus without appearing to be advocating normalization at the expense of Palestinians' and Arabs' rights.

"Jewish communities in the Arab region were never oppressed," Saeed pointed adding that on a visit to Damascus, she visited a Jewish neighborhood where Jewish doctors and merchants lived freely regardless of their religion. "The recent works are not innocent and come within certain policies although Israel itself strongly criticized the Egyptian sci-fi series 'THE END' talking about its defeat and disappearance," she warned.

Meanwhile, Saqqaf hailed the official attitude of Kuwait's ministry of information towards suspending the series 'UM HAROON' and reconfirmed Kuwait's commitment to the justice of the Palestinian cause.



Iman Saeed

Body and soul in Islam

By Hassan Twaha Bwambale

A human-being is made up of body and soul. Many verses of the Noble Quran allude to the fact that the soul is breathed into a fetus during the 15th week. Thus, the fetus stays with the soul, in its mother's womb, for six months (Quran 32: 7-9).

The body is regarded as a house for the soul. The soul departs it during sleep and returns when we wake up. When someone dies, the body becomes like a demolished house (Quran 39: 42). Sleep is essential for rest – among others – and death is imperative because it is a transformation from a temporal life to an everlasting one. Souls will be rejoined with the bodies on the Day of Judgment as they are rejoined with our bodies when we wake up from sleep (Quran 36: 51 – 52).

Indeed, Allah (the Almighty and Majestic) knows what is best for us and what is compatible with our natural dispositions, tendencies, abilities and needs. Whoever ignores the significance of striking a balance between our physical needs and spiritual ones, is deviant and will destabilize his life on earth and may cause incurable psychological and social diseases.

If we compare a human-being to a computer, then his body is like a computer itself, life like electricity, and the soul like software programs. So, with such complex softwares, the computer is different from other machines just like a human-being is different from other animals.

Allah (the Almighty and Majestic) described His righteous servants as: "Men whom neither commerce nor sale distracts from the remembrance of Allah and performance of prayer and giving of zakah." [Surat An-Nur:37]. Even when involved in business, they do not forget spiritual and moral duties due to fear of the account before Allah in the Hereafter. Imagine the conduct of these businessmen with this kind of belief and moral character, and how life in its every aspect would be among such people. (See www.en.alukah.net)

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) presented the most splendid examples and directives concerning the balance between spirituality and materialism. He (pbuh) would become extremely angry with those who opposed the inborn human nature and traditions of the prophets and messengers. Once, he heard that some people, out of keenness to worship Allah (the Almighty and Majestic) had taken an oath to refrain from sleep, marriage and food and drink. His position toward them was

strict determination to uphold the balance he had been charged to teach. Abu Juhafa (RA) narrated thus: "The Prophet (pbuh) made a bond of brotherhood between Salman and Abu Ad-Darda'a. Salman paid a visit to Abu Ad-Darda'a and found Um Ad-Darda'a dressed in shabby clothes and asked her why she was in that state. She replied, "Your brother Abu Ad-Darda'a is not interested in (the luxuries of) this world." In the meantime Abu Ad-Darda'a came and prepared a meal for Salman. Salman requested him to eat (with him), but Abu Ad-Darda'a said, "I am fasting." Salman said, "I am not going to eat unless you eat." So, Abu Ad-Darda'a ate with him. When a part of the night had passed, Abu Ad-Darda'a got up (to offer the night prayer), but Salman told him to sleep and Abu Ad-Darda'a slept. After sometime Abu Ad-Darda'a again got up but Salman told him again to sleep. When it was the last hours of the night, Salman told him to get up then, and both of them offered the Tahajjud (late night optional) prayer. Salman told Abu Ad-Darda'a, "Your Lord has a right on you, your soul has a right on you, and your family has a right on you; so you should give all their due rights." Abu Ad-Darda'a went to the Prophet (pbuh) and narrated the whole story. The Prophet (pbuh) said, "Salman has spoken the truth." (Al-Bukhari # 1, 968)

Despite unanimity about the dichotomous relationship between the body and the soul, the vast majority of the people focus more on the body at the expense of the soul. They eat good food, drink tasty beverages, and some undergo cosmetic surgery to look more beautiful or handsome, but very few make an effort for spiritual enlightenment. Allah (SWT) tells us what can be translated as: "And by the soul and Him who fashioned it, and informed it (with consciousness) of its wickedness and righteousness. Truly, whoever purifies it, succeeds. And truly, whoever defiles it, fails." (Ash-Shams 91: 7 – 9)

From the Islamic point of view, the religious man will be as active as the man of the world indeed, more active in his domestic and social life, which extends from the confines of the household to the market square, and even to international conferences (refer to Islamreligion.com).

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

Scriptwriter talks 'normalization' in LAPA interview

KUWAIT: In continuation of Al-Sada program launched by LAPA on Instagram, LOYAC's chairperson Fare'a Al-Saqaf recently interviewed scriptwriter Iman Saeed and discussed with her various topics related to the curfew and Ramadan Drama works, namely the ones controversially tackling the issue of normalization with Israel. Responding to a question about the effect of coronavirus and the curfew on her life, Saeed stressed that she normally leads a kind of slow life and is so much a home-loving person. "Therefore, there is not much difference to me except for some things that are becoming compulsory. However, I make use of the time reading, writing and listening to music," she explained, remarking that she writes less because the two works she wrote last year had depleted her energy and that she needs to stop writing from time to time for contemplation and reviewing what is going on around the world.

Saeed added that she had recently signed contracts for three episodes of a new series and that she now has a few drafts for social and political works. "I feel so accountable to my audience in terms of both technical and moral lesson issues. I do make some concessions due to drama market needs and agen-

International

SUNDAY, MAY 24, 2020



Hydroxychloroquine shows no virus benefit, raises death risk: Study

Morocco inmates make masks for fellow prisoners

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RIYADH: Saudis shop at a supermarket at the Panorama Mall in the capital Riyadh as Muslims prepare to celebrate the upcoming Eid Al-Fitr, that marks the end of the fasting month of Ramadan. — AFP

Khashoggi family forgive killers

Pardon criticized by UN rights official, fiancée

RIYADH: The family of slain Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi said on Friday they forgave his murderers, paving the way for a reprieve for five defendants sentenced to death for a crime that severely damaged the image of the kingdom's de facto ruler. "If a person forgives and makes reconciliation, his reward is due from Allah," Khashoggi's son Salah tweeted, citing a verse from the Quran on forgiveness. "Therefore, we the sons of the martyr Jamal Khashoggi announce that we pardon those who killed our father".

In Saudi Arabia, which lacks a codified legal system and follows Islamic law, forgiveness from a victim's family in such cases can allow for a formal pardon and a stay of execution. The murder caused a global uproar and tarnished the image of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Some Western governments, as well as the CIA, said they believed he had ordered the killing. Saudi officials denied he played a role, though in September 2019 the prince indicated some personal accountability, saying "it hap-

pened under my watch".

The court which issued the five death sentences in December said the killing was not premeditated, a ruling which backed assertions by Saudi officials but which contradicted the findings of a UN-led inquiry into Khashoggi's killing. Khashoggi was last seen at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on Oct 2, 2018, where he had gone to obtain documents for his impending wedding. His body was reportedly dismembered and removed from the building, and his remains have not been found.

Murder triggered a global outrage

Eleven suspects in all were put on trial in secretive proceedings in the capital Riyadh. In addition to the five sentenced to death, three were jailed and another three had the charges against them dismissed. Khashoggi's son Salah said last December that verdict had been "fair to us and that justice has been achieved." However, the trial was condemned by the United Nations and rights groups. Agnes Callamard, the UN special rapporteur for extrajudicial summary or arbitrary executions, accused

Saudi Arabia of making a "mockery" of justice by allowing the masterminds of the 2018 killing to go free.

A Saudi prosecutor at the time said there was no evidence connecting one of those officials, Saud al-Qahtani, to the killing and dismissed charges against Ahmed al-Asiri, a former deputy intelligence chief. The Saudi prosecutor had previously said that Qahtani, a former high-profile Saudi royal adviser, had discussed Khashoggi's activities before he entered the Saudi consulate with the team which went on to kill him. The prosecutor said Qahtani had acted in coordination with Asiri.

On Friday, Callamard criticized the potential pardon. "The Saudi authorities are playing out what they hope will be the final act in their well-rehearsed parody of justice in front of an international community far too ready to be deceived," she posted on Facebook. Khashoggi's fiancée Hatice Cengiz also condemned the pardon, tweeting: "Nobody has the right to pardon the killers. We will not pardon the killers nor those who ordered the killing," she said in a tweet. Salah Khashoggi and his three siblings still live in Saudi Arabia. News reports have said the family received money and real estate from the Saudi ruling family as compensation



In this file photo Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi attends a press conference in the Bahraini capital Manama. The sons of murdered Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi said Friday that they "forgive" the killers of their father.—AFP

for Khashoggi's killing. The family has denied this claim.— Reuters

Amityville horror: Dad stabbed during Zoom chat

NEW YORK: A New York suburb was in shock Friday over a gruesome murder that saw a 32-year-old man stab and kill his father, who was attending a Zoom conference that included about 20 participants. Dwight Powers, 72, was participating in an e-meeting via the Zoom video chat platform at approximately noon on Thursday when his son, Thomas Scully-Powers, emerged and began beating him, police in Long Island's Suffolk County said. Several participants in the virtual chat called emergency authorities, police said, as the horrific events unfolded.

After his arrest, Scully-Powers told police he stabbed his father approximately 15 times in the back, neck and torso, switching knives because the blades were bending, according to prosecutors. The county medical examiner said Powers sustained multiple stab wounds to his chest and back - with one slash across his neck nearly decapitating him. The murder took place in the town of Amityville - known in particular for the horror book series bearing its name and related film, which came out in 1979. "This is a shocking and disturbing case," Suffolk District Attorney Timothy Sini said in a statement. "By the defendant's own admissions, he brutally stabbed his own father repeatedly until he

was certain he was dead." When officers arrived at the scene, Scully-Powers jumped from a second-story window, police said, attempting to flee on foot. He ran to a nearby deli and allegedly began pouring Dr. Pepper soda on himself in a bid to wash off the blood. Police quickly apprehended him nearby, they said. They also found evidence at the apartment, which Scully-Powers shared with his father, of apparent attempts to clean the scene, including a mop and bucket in the bathroom along with a blood-soaked bed sheet found in a garbage bag.

Scully-Powers was briefly hospitalized for minor injuries sustained from his leap out the window in Amityville, located approximately 40 miles east of Manhattan. He was released from the hospital on Friday and arraigned on second-degree murder charges, police said. Prosecutors did not provide details about a possible motive. The man's lawyer, Jonathan Manley, entered a plea of not guilty, local media said. Scully-Powers is due back in court on May 26, and until then is detained without bail.

If convicted, he faces a sentence of 25 years to life in prison. He has had previous brushes with the law, with charges of reckless endangerment, drug possession and criminal mischief. The murder appeared to be the first carried out on Zoom, which has boomed in popularity since confinement measures forced people to stay at home during the coronavirus pandemic. Since many US state and local governments issued stay-at-home orders, interviews and meetings on Zoom - along with similar conferencing platforms from Facebook, Google and Apple - have exploded in use for business, school and socializing.—AFP

'It has even changed death': Virus disrupts burials in Turkey

ISTANBUL: In normal times, almost 200 people would have attended the funeral for Ahmet Ucuoku's 95-year-old father at an Istanbul cemetery. The coronavirus which took his life has changed all that. "Many of my relatives wouldn't come except for close family members and his sons who were authorized to attend only," Ucuoku told AFP. "We are just six or seven people." The scaled-down ceremony took place at a cemetery in the city's Beykoz district on the Asian side, which was built in March when Turkey confirmed its first virus case. It already houses the remains of over 700 people who died of contagious diseases including COVID-19. Ucuoku lost his father Ali to the virus after the old man was treated for 10 days. He also suffered from chronic illnesses.

Gathered around the grave, Ucuoku and his close family - all wearing protective masks and standing a few paces from each other - say prayers after the coffin is buried. Before the pandemic a shroud would suffice. Only an hour earlier, the group were at a nearby morgue where the body was washed by personnel in hazmat suits before being wrapped in cloth and placed in a coffin. A small collective prayer was then held outside the morgue with those attending respecting social distancing rules. The imam - also in a hazmat suit - led the funeral prayers for the deceased before the coffin was taken by hearse to the Beykoz cemetery.

'Speedy burial'

Ayhan Koc, head of Istanbul's cemeteries department, said a fast burial without traditional Islamic rituals was an efficient and correct method given the current situation. He said in the past there would have been a funeral prayer after the midday and afternoon prayers but now the aim was to ensure a speedy burial, without even taking the body to the mosque.

The government shut down mosques in March for mass prayers as part of efforts to stop the spread of the virus. And rituals are no longer allowed where people visit the family of the deceased to offer their condolences and where verses from the Koran are recited. "A virus which could only be seen through a microscope has changed the world order, everything; customs, traditions and funeral ceremonies. It has changed even death," said Koc. Turkey has recorded more than 4,200 coronavirus deaths and 153,000 confirmed cases but the daily death tolls have recently fallen below 100.

'Damn disease'

At the Beykoz cemetery, three women - a mother and her two daughters - wearing headscarves were sitting on the ground next to a headstone, reading the Koran, with tears in their eyes. "Mosques are closed because of the pandemic. We cannot bury our deceased in the way we wanted," said Filiz, who lost her 76-year-old father last week. He died from an infectious disease but was buried at Beykoz because he received treatment at a pandemic hospital although he tested negative for COVID-19. "Only six people could join the funeral prayer: his grandchildren, daughters and son-in-laws. We buried my dad altogether," she said, adding the ceremony was at least "conducted in a proper fashion".—AFP

International

Trapped migrant workers suffer from Lebanon's dollar crisis and lockdown

Migrant workers long marginalized in Lebanon

BEIRUT: Temitope can't find work in Lebanon since the Nigerian domestic worker escaped her employer's house last month. With Lebanon in deep financial crisis and dollars in short supply, people have less money to spend on help. And with Beirut airport shut under a coronavirus lockdown, Temitope can't go back home even if she tries. "I'm very afraid. There's not a day that I don't cry... without any money even to eat now," said Temitope, who climbed down a building after her employer beat her until she bled.

She now lives with friends, relying on any cash they can give her. Like many African and Asian women in Lebanon, Temitope, a mother of two, was recruited for work and came so she could send money home to her family. But dollar shortages piling pressure on hundreds of thousands of migrant workers in Lebanon have left some stranded in the streets and many begging to go home. Rights groups warn this puts workers at risk of abuse and trauma. Embassy and NGO shelters are saturated.

Since Lebanon plunged into crisis late last year, the local currency has lost more than half its value. Prices have soared as more Lebanese slide into poverty. The coronavirus pandemic has also hampered government efforts to repatriate workers via their embassies, and even those flights require payment in dollars. "There's more need than ever before for shelters...for those who lost jobs and have no place else to go," said Zeina Mezher of the

International Labour Organization. Activist groups say they field regular calls from unpaid domestic workers who have been kicked out or escaped their employer's households.

'Slavery'

Migrant workers form the backbone of sectors like waste collection and housekeeping in Lebanon, where many barely have any rights, face widespread racism and sometimes commit suicide. Most women work as maids under a sponsorship system called "kafala" that even the former labor minister likened to slavery. It prevents them from leaving without the employer's consent, with salaries as low as \$150 a month. Last month, police interrogated a man who tried to sell a Nigerian housekeeper for \$1,000 on Facebook. "The crises, whether it's coronavirus or the economy, expose the flaws in the kafala system," Mezher said. The prime minister's wife sparked controversy last week when she called on Lebanese - facing rising unemployment - to take up jobs usually filled by foreigners like housekeeper or doorman.

Bangladeshi trash collectors went on strike for weeks after the firm managing waste in Beirut, RAMCO, switched to paying them in Lebanese pounds, undermining the value of their wages. When workers stopped garbage trucks from going out in protest last week, riot police arrived, firing smoke bombs and beating some of them. Mohamad Ilahi, one of the workers, has not sent money to his

said the platform freed thousands of users—especially high-risk groups—from having to turn up at public services, as they were now able to sign documents digitally. Previously at civil services "physical attendance (by the public) was the norm and remote activity the exception," Pierrakakis told AFP.

'Archaic'

In 2019, Greece was among the EU's laggards in digital performance, ranking 25th in the Digital Economy and Society Index published by the European Commission. That same year, about 20 percent of the active population had no access to the Internet, nearly double the EU average of 10 percent according to Eurostat figures. Nikos Smyrmaios, an associate professor of digital media at the university of Toulouse, said the 2010-2018 Greek debt crisis had already forced the country to overhaul its "archaic" civil service, but the process was often "haphazard." "Let's hope the trend doesn't come to a halt once we are out of this emergency," said Spinellis.

Not everything has gone according to plan. On May 11, the government faced criticism after large crowds gathered outside the main Athens offices of just-reopened state electricity company PPC to settle bills. Officials later insisted that customers had received ample warning that most transactions could be handled online or by telephone. Many users have lamented a lack of network bandwidth, while noting that their own homes could not be turned into office work areas at the flick of a switch when the lockdown was imposed

the European Rohingya Council rights group. She was threatened with rape on Facebook after asking the government to allow boats carrying Rohingya refugees to land. The government turned back one boat with 200 refugees on board last month.

The Rohingya are a minority from largely Buddhist Myanmar, which brands them illegal immigrants although many say they can trace their ancestry there for generations. More than one million now live in camps in Bangladesh. Some 700,000 Rohingya fled from their homes in 2017 alone in the face of crackdown by Myanmar's army. Malaysia was long seen as a haven of relative freedom and prosperity by Rohingya and it is now home to more than 100,000 of them despite the fact that it brands them illegal immigrants rather than refugees.

Raids

But the coronavirus changed the atmosphere towards Malaysia's estimated millions of undocumented migrants and most of all towards the Rohingya. Sentiment hardened as the government imposed economically paralyzing movement restrictions to stop the spread of a virus that has now infected more than 7,000 people in the country of 31 million and killed 115 of them. As the mood turned against migrants, the government carried out raids this month in which at least 2,000 foreigners were arrested, some led away in handcuffs by agents in protective gear.

ing month of Ramadan, the nearby Martha Lutheran church stepped in to help, hosting Muslim prayers in Arabic and German. "It is a great sign and it brings joy in Ramadan and joy amid this crisis," said Mohamed Taha Sabry, the mosque's imam, who led his congregation in prayer watched over by a stained-glass window depicting the Virgin Mary. "This pandemic has made us a community. Crises bring people get together."

Places of worship reopened in Germany on May 4 after being shut for weeks under a coronavirus lockdown, but worshippers must maintain a minimum distance from one another of 1.5 meters. The church, a red-brick neo-renaissance building in Berlin's Kreuzberg district could hardly offer a sharper contrast to the cultural centre in Neukoelln where the Muslim congregation is



BEIRUT: Ethiopian domestic workers wait outside their country's consulate to register for repatriation, in Hazmieh suburb of the Lebanese capital Beirut. —AFP

wife and two daughters in Bangladesh for months. "My family cries a lot," he said. "They can't pay school fees, can't buy enough food."

He said the firm had finally agreed to a pay raise in local currency. RAMCO manager Walid BouSaad said the company had no choice because the Lebanese state, its main customer, stopped paying in

dollars late last year, on top of millions the government owes in arrears. "It is the worker's right to ask for payment in dollars," he said. "But some things are out of our hands." For Ilahi, the future in Lebanon remains uncertain. "I want to work. But without a solution, there's no use for me here," he said. "I will want to leave then. All of us will." —Reuters

COVID edges Greece closer to e-governance

ATHENS: The coronavirus crisis has forced Greece to take rapid steps to computerize its lumbering civil service and belatedly introduce e-governance in one of the EU's worst digital laggards, experts say. After recording its first coronavirus death on March 12, Athens took unprecedented measures totally at odds with its previous love affair with paperwork and red tape.

Diomidis Spinellis, head of the department of management science and technology at the Athens university of Economics, says that the COVID-19 crisis "accelerated" Greece's digital turn—though critics say the country has a long way to go. Between March 23 and May 4, when a nationwide lockdown was imposed, Greeks were required to inform authorities when leaving their homes. A special SMS service was introduced for those unable to print a special form created by the government.

Eventually, some 110 million messages were sent free of charge during this period, in an initiative praised by the OECD. The government also rolled out gov.gr, an online platform combining all public services and simplifying online access. Greece's minister of digital governance Kyriakos Pierrakakis

Rohingya targeted in Malaysia; coronavirus stokes xenophobia

KUALA LUMPUR: Eleyas, a Rohingya Muslim, fled to Malaysia six years ago, seeking a safe haven from persecution in Myanmar. Now he has been fired from his job by a boss who told him it was because of his origins and he is scared to leave his home in fear of arrest or harassment. "I want to find a new job, but it's not safe. We're all just staying at home," Eleyas, 38, told Reuters, not giving his full name for fear of retribution.

For decades, Muslim-majority Malaysia welcomed Rohingya and largely turned a blind eye to their technically illegal employment in low-paying jobs. But, as in some other parts of the world, the novel coronavirus outbreak has turned sentiment against foreigners, who have been accused of spreading disease, burdening the state and taking jobs as the economy plummets.

While the Rohingya have been the most obvious targets, other migrants are also worried in a country that relies heavily on foreign labour at factories, construction sites and plantations. "There is harassment on the streets and online. I've never seen anything like this in Malaysia before," said one Malaysian activist, Tengku Emma Zuriana Tengku Azmi, from

Muslims pray in Berlin church to comply with social distancing rules

BERLIN: A Berlin church is hosting Muslims who are unable to fit into their mosque for Friday prayers because of social distancing guidelines. The Dar Assalam mosque in the Neukolln district normally welcomes hundreds of Muslims to its Friday services. But it can currently only accommodate 50 people at a time under Germany's coronavirus restrictions. During the holy fast-



ATHENS: A woman looks at the website of Taxisnet in Athens yesterday. The coronavirus crisis has forced Greece to take rapid steps to computerize its lumbering civil service and belatedly introduce e-governance in one of the EU's worst digital laggards, experts say. —AFP

in March. "We are celebrating the disappearance of the fax in 2020," jeers Dimitris Tsingos, a tech entrepreneur and founder of the Hellenic startup association.

"There are efforts by the government but it's hardly revolutionary... there is still a lot of work to be done," he said. Diamanto Zafiraki, a 38-year-old economy ministry employee, has her personal laptop to work with, but has to share with her eight-year-old twins when it's time for homework. "I don't have a dedicated work area at home. I work from my kitchen, using equipment that is not made for this purpose," she said. —AFP



UKHTIA: Rohingya refugees gather at a market as first cases of COVID-19 coronavirus have emerged in the area, in Kutupalong refugee camp in Ukhtia. —AFP

The government has not given full details of the detainees' nationalities, but at least 800 of them were from Myanmar and the vast majority of people from Myanmar in Malaysia are Rohingya. Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin's office did not respond to requests for comment on the arrests and the backlash towards refugees and foreign workers. The government has not said how many Rohingya have been found to have the virus. Eleyas said that as the mood soured, he and eight other Rohingya workers were fired from their jobs at a supermarket. He did not identify the store, for fear he could be targeted. —Reuters

accustomed to gathering. "It was a strange feeling because of the musical instruments, the pictures," said worshipper Samer Hamdoun. "But when you look, when you forget the small details, this is the House of God in the end..."

The Islamic Council, an umbrella group of 400 mosques, said in April that many face bankruptcy because the closures stretched into the holy fasting month of Ramadan, usually a vital period for donations. The church's pastor, Monika Matthias, said she had felt moved by the Muslim call to prayer. "I took part in the prayer," she said. "I gave a speech in German. And during prayer, I could only say yes, yes, yes, because we have the same concerns and we want to learn from you. And it is beautiful to feel that way about each other." —Reuters

News in brief

Egypt 'coronavirus tax'

CAIRO: Egypt's cabinet has preliminarily approved a bill that taxes one percent of citizens' salaries to cushion the impact of coronavirus on strained government finances, sparking online criticism. The draft law - due to come into effect from July, pending parliamentary approval - imposes the deductions across the public and private sectors on employees with monthly net incomes above 2,000 Egyptian pounds (around \$125). "All governments across the world give out money to their people except for Egypt" to help cushion the effects of coronavirus, said one Twitter user. Instead, the Egyptian government "reaches into the pockets of Egyptians to take 1 percent." The bill also stipulates a 0.5 percent effective tax on state pensions to help "confront some of the economic repercussions resulting from the spread of coronavirus," the cabinet said in a statement this week. On Facebook, some citizens alleged that depriving pensioners of part of their income was "unconstitutional". —AFP

No kissing the bride

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka lifted a ban Friday on wedding receptions as part of an easing of coronavirus restrictions, but grooms may not kiss the bride - at least in public. The country's well-heeled usually hold wedding celebrations with thousands of guests, and the festivities can last for days with much eating, drinking, dancing and singing. But under the new guidelines there should be no more than 100 guests, all of whom must stay a meter apart and wear masks - including the happy couple. "Guests should not be allowed to kiss, hug or shake hands," said the latest health ministry rules seen by AFP. "Greeting each other should be done without any touching." Sri Lanka imposed a nationwide curfew on March 20 that ruled out gatherings of any sort, but the restrictions have been eased in many districts that are not considered high-risk. Religious gatherings remain banned while only the bereaved family are allowed at funerals. —AFP

8 inmates killed in Mexico

PUNTE GRANDE: A violent clash at a prison in Mexico's central state of Jalisco on Friday left eight inmates dead and another eight prisoners hospitalized with injuries, state security officials said. During the incident at a jail in the Puente Grande complex, three people were killed by firearms and four others died from beatings, Jalisco's prosecutor Gerardo Octavio Solis said in a press conference. Authorities later confirmed another death, after nine people were initially hospitalized. They said the fight broke out as inmates participated in a sports activity. Officials said jail staff never lost control of the facility or were threatened, and that they recovered two firearms and a homemade explosive device. Five people were detained for having a possible role in the confrontation. As part of the investigation, authorities said they will probe whether any public officials were involved. —Reuters

Egypt arrests 11 suspects

CAIRO: Egyptian security forces arrested 11 people on suspicion of fabricating media content for the Qatar-based Al Jazeera network, the interior ministry said Friday. The suspects were allegedly found to be collaborating with members of the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood group to create content that included a documentary on Egypt's troubled North Sinai region in exchange for large sums of money, the ministry said in a statement. It said the suspects aimed "to undermine national security and stability by producing fabricated media reports... on the country's internal situation to spread rumors". The investigations were handed over to the Supreme State Security Prosecution, the ministry added. Security forces have been battling a long-running Islamist insurgency in North Sinai, spearheaded by a local affiliate of the Islamic State group. The region is largely closed off to the media, except for rare visits supervised by the military. —AFP

International

West rebukes China over move to tighten grip on Hong Kong

Planned security agencies a 'death knell' for autonomy

HONG KONG: Chinese plans to impose national security laws on Hong Kong could see mainland intelligence agencies set up bases there, raising fears of direct law enforcement and what the United States branded a "death knell" for the city's autonomy. Communist Party rulers in Beijing on Friday unveiled details of the legislation that critics see as a turning point for the former British colony, which enjoys many freedoms, including an independent legal system and right to protest, not allowed on the mainland.

Pro-democracy activists and politicians have for years opposed such legislation, arguing it could erode its autonomy, guaranteed under the "one country, two systems" agreement under which Britain returned Hong Kong to China in 1997. "Beijing is attempting to silence Hong Kongers' critical voices with force and fear," activist Joshua Wong, one of the leaders of pro-democracy street protests in 2014, tweeted.

Hong Kong activists called for people to rise up against the proposal, aimed at tackling secession, subversion, terrorism, and foreign interference, that has sent shockwaves across the business and diplomatic communities. Foreign diplomats fear establishing new Beijing agencies in Hong Kong could give mainland security and intelligence officers enforcement powers. "This is a great moment to reboot the protest," said university student Kay, 24, who took part in last year's often violent anti-government and anti-Beijing unrest, with protesters angry at perceived meddling by China with Hong Kong's freedoms, a charge Beijing denies.

The security law plan hit financial markets on concerns the city's status as a financial hub is at risk.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng index closed down 5.6%, its largest daily percentage drop since July 2015. Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam said her government will "fully cooperate" with the Chinese parliament to safeguard national security, which she said would not affect rights, freedoms or judicial independence. The proposals have heightened tensions between Beijing and Washington, whose relationship is already frayed by trade disputes and reciprocal accusations over handling of the pandemic.

US President Donald Trump warned Washington would react "very strongly" if Beijing went ahead with the security law. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the "disastrous proposal" would be the "death knell" for Hong Kong's autonomy and that the United States stood with the people of Hong Kong. "The United States strongly urges Beijing to reconsider its disastrous proposal, abide by its international obligations, and respect Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy, democratic institutions, and civil liberties, which are key to preserving its special status under US law," he said.

'You can't trust China'

Hong Kong's last colonial governor, Chris Patten, told Channel 4 television that party rulers in Beijing were a "frightened lot of bullies". "You cannot trust (President) Xi Jinping's China. That's different from previous administrations. He tightened up as a dictator. He cannot abide anyone who disagrees with him and the Chinese government."

Britain expects China to respect the rights and freedoms of Hong Kong, Prime Minister Boris Johnson's spokesman said. In his annual report to parliament, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang said China would



HONG KONG: Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam (center) holds a press conference after attending the opening session of the National People's Congress (NPC) at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. —AFP

establish a "sound" legal system and enforcement mechanisms to ensure national security in Hong Kong and Macau, a former Portuguese colony that returned to China in 1999. The proposed move will see China's parliament endorse, then annex the laws into Hong Kong's mini-constitution, the Basic Law, without any local legislative scrutiny, according to a draft seen by Reuters.

The document said the laws will safeguard the central government's "overall jurisdiction" as well as Hong Kong's "high autonomy" given Hong Kong's "increasingly notable national security risks". "When needed, relevant national security organs of the Central People's Government will set up agencies" in Hong Kong to safeguard national security, the draft said. —Reuters

South Asia's cyclone death toll passes 100

KOLKATA: At least 106 people died in the fiercest cyclone to hit Bangladesh and eastern India since 1999, officials said Friday as aerial footage revealed immense flooding in coastal areas. Amphan, only the second "super cyclone" ever recorded over the Bay of Bengal, bulldozed houses, tore off roofs, uprooted trees and left millions without power when it hit late on Wednesday.

Mamata Banerjee, premier of West Bengal said Friday that 80 people died in the Indian state, while Bangladesh's toll rose to 26, health department spokesperson Ayesha Akhter said. The total was much lower than the many thousands of fatalities recorded in previous cyclones, thanks to better forecasting and the timely evacuation of over three million people. However, huge damage was done in coastal areas as vast volumes of seawater rushed inland, inundating villages and shrimp farms that are vital to the Bangladeshi economy.

The United Nations in Geneva said Friday that the saltwater is expected to have "a severe impact on livelihoods for

the next 2-3 years". West Bengal's capital Kolkata was also badly hit, with 19 dead, parts of the old city flooded and hangar roofs at the airport caved in on top of aircraft. The bodies of 11 people who were electrocuted were recovered from the flooded streets. The storm also blew off the black weathercock on top of a 205-year-old church in Kolkata city centre that has survived countless cyclones before.

"It was as old as the church," Father Swarup Bar told AFP. "We have only been able to trace small pieces of one of the wings of the cock so far." Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday morning flew over the affected areas by helicopter and announced \$132 million in government aid. "The whole country is now with West Bengal at this critical time and we will jointly rebuild the areas ruined by the cyclone," Modi said. The European Union also announced initial funding of 500,000 euros (\$545,000) for India and 1.1 million euros for Bangladesh.

Habitats damaged

The damage did not appear to be as



WEST BENGAL: Residents carry Tapas Pramanik (center), 41 in search of an ambulance or vehicle to take him to the hospital, following the landfall of cyclone Amphan in Khejuri area. —AFP

bad as feared in the Sunderbans, the vast mangrove forest area home to Royal Bengal tigers, Ganges dolphins and other endangered species straddling India and Bangladesh. "Some Keora trees in the forest have been uprooted and some branches were broken. But overall the damage was not big," said Amir Hossain Chowdhury, Bangladesh's chief forester.

He said that 65 of the forest's 81 freshwater ponds that are vital for local fauna would now be pumped to remove

seawater brought in by a smaller-than-predicted storm surge. "This is a temporary setback for the forest's wildlife including the Bengal Tigers, monkeys, spotted deer and others," Chowdhury told AFP. Four teams would also scour the dense 140,000-hectare forest to inspect the damage to wildlife, but so far no dead bodies had been found, he added. Like in previous cyclones, the vast Sunderbans area, a UNESCO world heritage site dubbed the "lungs of Bangladesh", acted as a brake on the

Eid al-Fitr together like in past years," he added.

Frustrated police are battling a tide of fake travel documents being sold online and through word of mouth, with authorities on holiday island Bali last week arresting seven people suspected of peddling bogus papers. Markets have also been packed with throngs of shoppers buying food and clothes for Eid celebrations. Some of the Southeast Asian nation's mosques are expected to draw big crowds despite official calls to pray at home. Widespread social distancing violations have generated a slew of angry responses - under the hashtag #WhateverIndonesia - from social media users fed up with fellow citizens' blatant rule breaking.

But that has not done much to convince the people playing a cat-and-mouse game with police by hiding inside vehicles, under tarpaulins slung over the back of trucks, or even, reportedly, inside a concrete mixer. Authorities say they have nabbed hundreds of drivers paid to smuggle travelers. "There are lots of ways people are trying to trick us," said Jakarta police spokesman Yusri Yunus. "We're not trying to make their lives difficult. This is all meant to reduce the spread of coronavirus," he added. Indonesia recorded its biggest one-day jump in virus cases this week with the nationwide death toll at 1,326 - the highest in Asia outside China. But infections and deaths are widely believed to be much higher in the country of more than 260 million, where testing rates have been among the lowest in the world.

Laid-off Jakarta bus driver Maulana Arif Budi Satrio became a local media sensation after he claimed to have made the 500-kilometre journey to his hometown Solo on foot after his car was turned back at a checkpoint. Whether he had vehicular help along the way remains an open question. But the trip earned the exhausted Satrio an official scolding - and quarantine - when he arrived at his destination. The 38-year-old said he did not have the luxury of staying put as the global pandemic threatens to push millions of Indonesians into poverty. "The company I worked for laid off drivers like me," he said. "So I only had two options - stay in Jakarta with no money or go back home." — AFP

Hydroxychloroquine shows no virus benefit, raises death risk: Study

PARIS: A study of nearly 100,000 coronavirus patients has shown no benefit in treating them with anti-viral drugs hydroxychloroquine and chloroquine and even increased the likelihood of them dying in hospital. Hydroxychloroquine is normally used to treat arthritis but pronouncement from public figures including US President Donald Trump - who announced this week he is taking the drug - has prompted governments to bulk buy the medicine. Chloroquine is an anti-malarial. Both drugs can produce potentially serious side effects, particularly heart arrhythmia. And neither drug benefitted patients hospitalized with COVID-19, according to a study published on Friday in *The Lancet*.

Looking at the records of 96,000 patients across hundreds of hospitals, they found that administering the drugs actually increased the risk of dying. They compared outcomes from four groups: those treated with hydroxychloroquine alone, with chloroquine alone, and then two groups given the respective drugs in combination with antibiotics. There was also a control group of patients not given these treatments. At the end of the study period around nine percent of those in the control group had died. Of those treated with hydroxychloroquine or chloroquine alone, 18 percent and 16.4 percent respectively had died.

And those given each drug in combination with antibiotics were even more likely to die: 22.8 percent with chloroquine and 23.8 percent with hydroxychloroquine. The authors estimated that the drugs put patients at up to 45 percent higher risk of dying from COVID-19 compared with underlying health issues. "Treatment with chloroquine or hydroxychloroquine does not benefit patients with COVID-19," said Mandeep Mehra, lead author of the study and executive director of the Brigham and Women's Hospital Center for Advanced Heart Disease in Boston. "Instead, our findings suggest it may be associated with an increased risk of serious heart problems and increased risk of death." —AFP

Ramadan rule-breakers: Indonesians try to beat Eid exodus ban

JAKARTA: Indonesians are turning to smugglers and bogus travel documents to get around bans on an annual end-of-Ramadan exodus that could send coronavirus cases skyrocketing in the world's biggest Muslim majority nation. Thousands are using any trick in the book to reach their hometowns in time for celebrations at the end of Islam's holy fasting month this weekend, a festival known as Eid al-Fitr. "It is a critical moment," said Doni Monardo, head of Indonesia's COVID-19 mitigation task force. "I'm afraid people who go to other regions will come back infected and all of our efforts will be wasted."

Every year, millions of travellers pack into airports, train stations and ports across the nearly 5,000 kilometer long archipelago in a mass migration similar to China's Lunar New Year holiday or Christmas. Fearing a public health disaster, the government last month slapped a ban on domestic sea and air travel and set up roadblocks to stop the cross-country movement. It later relaxed those rules over concerns about a collapse in Southeast Asia's biggest economy, but only for those who could prove they were virus-free and had a professional reason to travel.

That loophole was not lost on Kamal and his wife who set about getting a fake certificate for their daughter, a university student in the capital Jakarta - the country's virus epicenter. With the help of friends, the couple said they managed to obtain a government-agency stamped letter that claimed their daughter was hired to distribute pandemic supplies in her hometown Makassar on Sulawesi island. "We're very worried about her health if she stays in Jakarta," said Kamal, who asked that his real name not be used. "But the most important thing of all is that we miss her so much. We want to celebrate

Morocco inmates make masks for fellow prisoners

CASABLANCA: Prisoners in Morocco are doing their bit in the country's fight against the spread of coronavirus - by making thousands of face masks for fellow inmates. "We feel like we are contributing to the collective effort, even if it's from behind prison walls," 40-year-old Khalid, wearing a white coat and a face mask, told AFP during an interview in the presence of prison management.

An inmate at Casablanca's Ain Sebaa prison - the kingdom's most crowded jail, with some 8,000 inmates - Khalid leaves his cell every day for the sewing workshop, passing through long corridors that reek of disinfectant. He finishes off the masks while others cut the fabric or pack the protective items into plastic bags for distribution to some 80,000 prisoners across the country. The North African kingdom has officially declared 7,300 coronavirus infections, including 197 deaths. It has extended its lockdown until June 10, and anyone going outdoors requires authorization and must wear a mask. Police checks are frequent, and those caught risk up to three months in prison and a fine of up to 1,300 dirhams (\$130) for violating the rules.

'Spirit of citizenship'

One of the aims of the pilot program, launched at Ain Sebaa prison at the start of May, is to "foster a spirit of citizenship" among detainees and "help them to manage their detention during the lockdown", prison management said. Since Morocco declared a medical state of emergency in mid-March, prison visits and any activities that require outside intervention have been halted. Hospital visits are limited to emergencies, while court attendance has also been suspended, with hearings held via video conference.

Over 300 virus cases have been recorded among inmates in the country's prisons, with about a quarter of infections among personnel, according to official figures. Rights groups have urged authorities to release some detainees to limit the risk of infection among the country's notoriously overcrowded prisons. At the start of April, King Mohammed VI pardoned more than 5,600 prisoners. No cases have been registered at the Ain Sebaa facility, which has "rigorously" applied preventive measures, director Abderrahim Kerrari said. Disinfectant has been installed at the main entrance and in areas leading to the cells, and sanitizing gel stands on every table in the workshop.

'Modest contribution'

Some of the mask-makers, like 54-year-old Mustafa, worked in the clothing industry before their arrest. He said he was happy to be "useful to society", while fellow inmate Wafaa, 37, said he'd signed up to develop skills and gain experience. The program also aims to "prepare inmates for reintegration into society by instilling in them values such as solidarity", Kerrari said. Those taking part were already involved in the prison's sewing workshops, and received two days of training on mask-making. Participants are paid for their efforts, based on the number of days worked, although the amount was not disclosed.

The administration chose them for their "good conduct", giving priority to inmates serving shorter sentences, Kerrari added. Collectively, some one hundred prisoners in around 20 Moroccan facilities are making 20,000 masks a day - just a drop in the ocean when compared to the 10 million produced daily in local factories repurposed in the fight against the pandemic. —AFP

Business

SUNDAY, MAY 24, 2020

10 Japan's FM, CB chief vow to use all tools to fight virus fallout**11** NBK launches Eid guide, covering key services**11** Italy's cafes, shops caught between rock and hard place

LONDON: An employee wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) including a face mask and a visor staffs the entrance to up-scale department store Fortnum and Mason on Piccadilly in central London on Friday. — AFP

UK's debt soars to highest since 1963

Deficit for 2019/20 revised up to 62.7bn pounds

LONDON: A measure of British public debt leapt to close to 100 percent of the country's economic output in April, its highest in nearly 60 years, and retail sales slumped by a record 18 percent as the coronavirus crisis hammered the economy.

Government borrowing of 62.1 billion pounds (\$75.80 billion) in April alone was just a fraction lower than its total for the whole 2019/20 financial year. It was also far higher than a median forecast of 40 billion pounds in a Reuters poll of economists.

On top of that, March's borrowing was revised up sharply to almost 15 billion pounds as the government's emergency job-saving scheme began and tax revenues were revised down. That took the stock of public debt to nearly 98 percent of gross domestic product, also reflecting a lower estimate of the size of the economy based on a recent coronavirus scenario by Britain's budget forecasters.

crisis" and jobs would be lost in the "days, weeks and months to come".

"The double whammy of the precipitous fall in economic activity and the government's measures to combat the crisis has already pushed borrowing to alarmingly high levels," Ruth Gregory, an economist with Capital Economics, said.

"While the small easing of the lockdown on 13th May probably meant the government did not have to borrow quite as much this month as in April, it's clear the government will still have to borrow a few hundred billion pounds this year."

Bank of England Deputy Governor Dave Ramsden told Reuters that an economic recovery later this year could be slower than in a central bank scenario published earlier this month, and he pointed to several risks of long-term damage.

Borrowing costs down

"While there is significant pressure on the public finances, there are no signs that the government is struggling to find the cash," Charlie McCurdy, a researcher at the Resolution Foundation think-tank, said.

British government borrowing costs over two and five years fell to new record lows as debt markets opened on Friday. "It would therefore be wrong to reduce coronavirus support measures prematurely," McCurdy said.

Central government spending leapt by 54 percent to over 109 billion pounds while receipts fell about 26 percent to 45.6 billion pounds. The ONS also said British retail sales fell by the most on record in April as much of the sector was shuttered by the government's coronavirus lockdown.

Sales volumes slumped 18.1 percent in April from March, a slightly bigger fall than forecast in the Reuters poll. James Smith, an economist with ING, said there might not be a quick bounce-back for retailers when the lockdown is lifted. "Recent surveying from YouGov showed that just under half of people would be uncomfortable with returning to a clothing shop, although the jury is out on whether the public will become more relaxed by the time retailers do reopen next month," he said.

The volume of clothing sales in April plummeted by 50.2 percent when compared with March 2020, which had already fallen by 34.9 percent on the previous month.

But the share of spending that was done online jumped to 31 percent of the total, a big increase from 22 percent in March. Fuel sales tumbled by a record 52 percent, reflecting the impact of the government's lockdown order. But alcohol stores showed an increase in sales, up 2.3 percent. — Reuters

All 50 US states shed jobs in April

WASHINGTON: Unemployment rates rose and total employment fell in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia in April as efforts to contain the coronavirus pandemic forced businesses to close across the country, the Labor Department said on Friday.

The department's Bureau of Labor Statistics said 43 states set record-high rates of unemployment last month, with the highest being in Nevada, the state with the greatest reliance on the hard-hit food services and hospitality industry. Nevada's jobless rate surged by 21.3 percentage points from March to 28.2 percent, which was nearly double the national rate of 14.7 percent in April.

The monthly breakdown of state-level nonfarm employment and jobless rates, published two weeks after the national payrolls report, painted a picture of widespread but nonetheless uneven devastation caused by the spread of COVID-19, the respiratory illness triggered by the novel coronavirus.

The May 8 payrolls report showed a record 20.5

million jobs were lost in April, the steepest plunge in US employment since the Great Depression. Friday's report indicated more than a quarter of those job losses were concentrated in three of the largest US states: California, which shed 2.3 million jobs; New York, which has seen the largest number of US COVID-19 cases and deaths and lost 1.8 million positions; and Texas, which has suffered a double blow from plunging oil prices and lost 1.3 million jobs. In Nevada, home to the global gambling mecca of Las Vegas, half of the nearly 245,000 jobs lost in April were in the leisure and hospitality sector. That industry has suffered the greatest losses nationally from the reductions in travel and widespread closures of dine-in restaurants during a month when stay-at-home orders were deployed broadly.

The leisure and hospitality sector losses also took a major toll on Hawaii, which was one of only three states with an unemployment rate above 20 percent - Nevada and Michigan were the other two. The Pacific island state lost more than 55 percent of leisure and hospitality jobs last month, accounting for 57 percent of all jobs lost in that period.

In Michigan, more than one of every five jobs was eliminated, at least temporarily. The leisure and hospitality sector led the declines there, too, but a quarter of the state's losses came in the manufacturing and construction sectors.

Layoffs persist

Layoffs have persisted in May even as all 50 states have reopened businesses to one degree or another. On Thursday, the BLS reported more than 2.4 million people filed for unemployment benefits for the first time last week and those continuing to receive jobless relief payments topped 25 million in the week ended May 9.

That data suggests the worst may not be over for the hardest-hit states such as Nevada, Hawaii and Michigan. The number of continued claims rose in all three, including a 31 percent week-over-week increase in Hawaii. Economists believe that progress in driving down infection rates will be an important factor behind the success of state re-opening efforts.

On that front, at least, both Hawaii and Nevada appear to be leaders, and they are among just eight states to have shown three straight weeks of declines in the 7-day average of new cases. Michigan is among 20 states that have seen declines in two of the past three weeks. — Reuters



MIAMI BEACH, Florida: Protesters stand together asking the state of Florida to fix its unemployment system on Friday in Miami Beach, Florida. — AFP



Retail sales slump

Wage cost

The United Kingdom has drawn up plans to require employers to cover 20 percent to 30 percent of furloughed employees' wages from August to reduce the vast burden of the coronavirus crisis on government finances, The Times newspaper reported. The United Kingdom on May 12 extended its job retention scheme - the centerpiece of its attempts to cushion the coronavirus hit to the economy - by four months but told employers they would have to help to meet its huge cost from August.

"The Treasury has drawn up plans that would require employers to cover between 20 and 30 per cent of people's wages," The Times said. "They would also be required to cover the cost of employer's national insurance contributions, on average 5 per cent of wages."

Finance minister Rishi Sunak is expected to announce the changes next week, The Times said. Sunak said on Friday that Britain was facing a "very serious economic

Business

Japan's FM, CB chief vow to use all tools to fight virus fallout

BOJ can keep yields low even if govt sells more bonds: Kuroda

TOKYO: Japanese Finance Minister Taro Aso and Bank of Japan Governor Haruhiko Kuroda pledged on Friday to deploy all necessary fiscal and monetary policy tools to combat the widening economic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic. After a rare bilateral meeting, the two issued a joint statement committing to do "whatever it

"By meeting like this, we wanted to convey to the world that Japan's government and the central bank are working as one to combat the pandemic," he said.

The bilateral meeting came hours after an emergency BOJ rate review at which the central bank decided to create a new loan scheme to channel more funds to small businesses hit by the coronavirus.

The pair's first such meeting in nearly four years underscores the concern Tokyo has over the growing risk that without firmer policy steps, the pandemic could lead to a spike in bankruptcies and job losses that may leave a lasting scar on a fragile economy.

Japan slipped into recession for the first time since 2015 in the first quarter of the year, putting the economy on track for its deepest slump in the postwar period as the health crisis shuts down businesses and consumer spending. Aso and Kuroda frequently interact in parliament, on government panels and at international meetings. But it is their first official one-on-one meeting since 2016, when Britain's surprise vote



TOKYO: Japanese Finance Minister Taro Aso (left) meets with Bank of Japan Governor Haruhiko Kuroda in Tokyo on Friday. — AFP

to exit the European Union jolted markets.

Central banks around the world have slashed interest rates and pumped out huge amounts of money to finance massive spending packages to cushion the blow from the pandemic. The BOJ expanded its

stimulus in March and April, ramping up risky asset purchases and pledging to buy as many government bonds as needed to cap long-term borrowing costs at zero.

For its part, the government is set to unveil next week a fresh batch of spending

measures to combat the virus fallout, on top of the record \$1.1 trillion stimulus package it announced in April.

In a joint news conference with Aso, Kuroda said the BOJ's yield curve control (YCC) is designed in a way to ensure that long-term borrowing costs do not rise too much even if the government ramps up spending via additional debt issuance.

"Our policy framework can keep long-term interest rates from rising even if the government increases bond issuance. It helps enhance the mutual effects of fiscal and monetary policies," he said.

Under YCC, the BOJ pledges to buy as much bonds as needed to keep 10-year government bond yields around 0 percent. It also guides short-term interest rates at -0.1 percent.

While the government has lifted the state of emergency put in place in most prefectures that led to infection numbers stabilizing, some regions including the Tokyo metropolitan area still have restrictions in place. Those measures are due to be reviewed next week. — Reuters



Japan economy in extremely severe state

to facilitate corporate financing and stabilize markets as part of efforts to cushion the blow from the health crisis.

"Japan's economy is in an extremely severe state and we need to pull out of this situation as soon as we can," Aso told reporters after the meeting.

Special Report

A golden year for Kuwait?

By Giles Coghlan

KUWAIT: Just under one-tenth (9.2 percent) of Kuwait's foreign reserves (\$40.6 billion) are in gold, and Kuwait's gold reserves currently stand at around 79 tons. This should prove to be good financial support for the nation as market conditions appear almost perfect for a strong rise in gold prices over the next 12 months. This article explores the historical increases we witnessed in gold's prices and why current market conditions are advantageous for expectations of a further increase in gold's price.

What was behind gold's two biggest rallies of the last 50 years?

Looking at the chart below we can see two major bull runs experienced by gold in the last 50 years. The first big gold rally came when Governments gave up control of gold prices and relaxed private ownership rules around 1970.

The second major bull rally was between 2003 and 2011 when the annual demand for gold increased from 2600 tons

Crisis of 2008/09, namely the coordinated cutting of interest rates around the world. Some central banks even have negative interest rates now including the European Central Bank, the Swiss National Bank and the Bank of Japan.

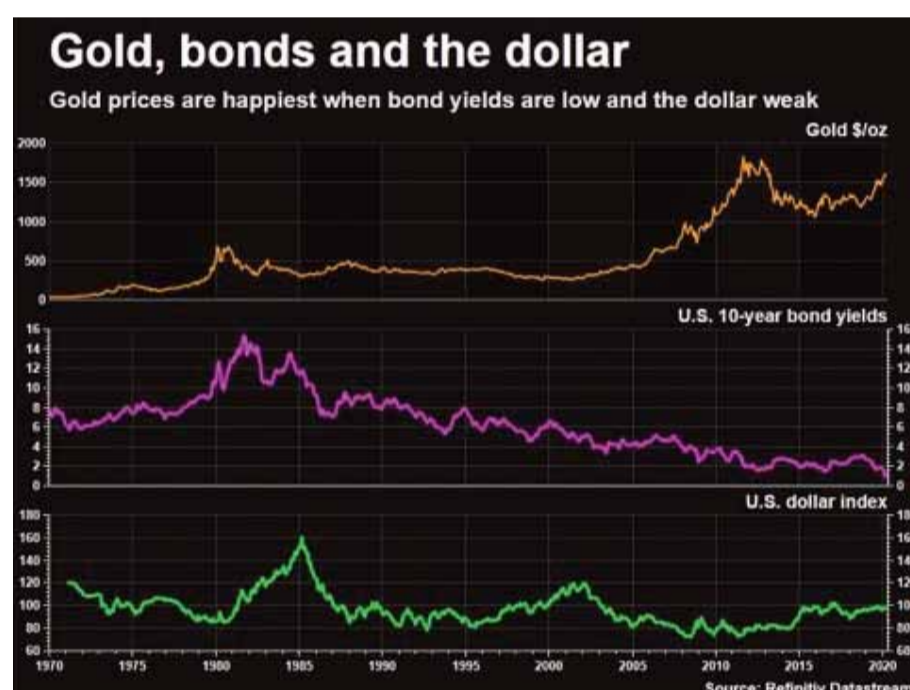
Recession

Countries across the world are entering recessions brought about by a slowdown in growth due to COVID-19. In recessions, gold tends to shine very brightly; during each of the three most-recent major recessions in 1990-91, 2001, and 2007-2009, gold increased in value. Gold is historically good to hedge into recessions and many investors are already adding to their gold holdings.

Gold, bond prices, and the US dollar

With many central banks moving down towards zero interest rates, and some central banks already having negative interest rates, investors are encouraged to move into gold. If the level of inflation is higher than a country's interest rate, money in the bank loses value. Ouch! This makes gold an attractive option for investors who want to try and hedge some of the risk involved in staying in cash.

Furthermore, as bond yields fall and the



see that gold bottomed when the Federal Reserve launched its quantitative easing programme. The rallies that ensued were historic, with gold nearly tripling and silver rallying nearly 500 percent during that period. Currencies are starting to devalue now and this increases the appeal of gold.

Gold sales down in China and India

One area of gold purchases that have fallen during the first few months of the year is jewelry demand. Unsurprisingly, the COVID-19 pandemic has heavily reduced jewelry demand for the 1st quarter as governments across the globe imposed lockdown measures. Demand for jewelry fell to its lowest on record. This has been led by a 65 percent decline in China, the largest jewelry consumer, and the first market to succumb to the outbreak. A key point to note is that once lockdowns are lifted we can expect to see jewelry demand rise again and, in conjunction with more ETF buying, should push gold demand much higher next quarter. Take a look at this chart below and look at the ETF and jewelry levels of demand in particular.

Exchange-traded fund holdings grow

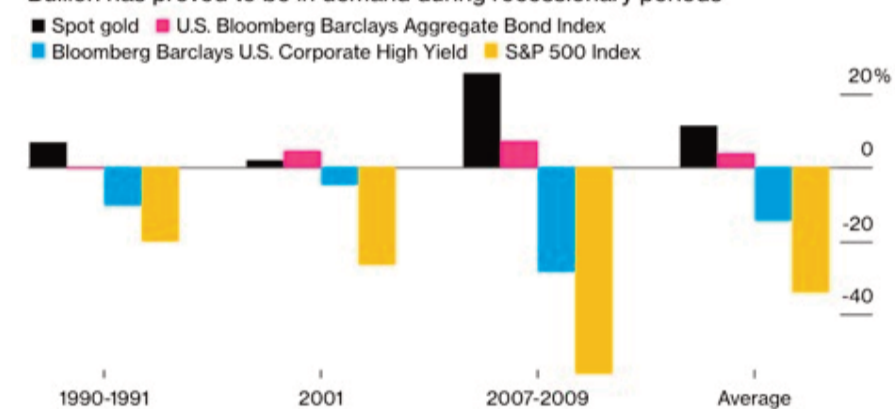
Holdings of exchange-traded funds are now at record highs, supporting gold demand. According to the World Gold Council levels of ETF holdings are now at an all-time high of 3,355 tons. Assets under management also reached a new record

high of \$184bn as gold in US dollars (XAUUSD) moved higher by 5.8 percent. Furthermore, low-cost gold-backed ETFs in the US have seen positive flows for 22 of the past 23 months. They have increased their collective assets to 91t, which amounts to roughly the holdings of all Asian-based funds. So, although ETF holdings in gold are high this year they are still relatively low compared to total ETF holding levels which are over \$6 trillion. So, there is plenty of room for further moves into ETF holdings. It is also interesting to note that in April, North American funds had large gold ETF inflows of 144t (US\$7.8bn, 8.3 percent AUM) indicating that demand is picking up the pace.

The downside risk for gold

One area of concern for gold going forward is that investors sell gold as a last resort at times of intense fear. You may have noticed during the height of the COVID-19 crisis that when equity markets were being sold heavily gold was being sold at the same time. If markets see heightened levels of fear and volatility again we will expect to see gold being sold temporarily. However, even if that happens on a second COVID-19 wave, the long-term picture for gold remains bullish which will support Kuwait's economy via its gold holdings. This really does look like gold's time to shine. Note: Giles Coghlan is chief currency analyst at HYCM

Bullion has proved to be in demand during recessionary periods



Source: BlackRock, Bloomberg
Note: Drawdowns are quantified by "peak to trough" of the S&P 500 during NBER classified recessions.

to 4700+ tons. Gold prices were helped by coordinated interest rate cuts from central banks around the world. Investors seeking alpha were once again drawn to the safe-haven status of gold. In fact, we are seeing a very similar response by central banks to the COVID-19 crisis to the one we saw during the Global Financial

risk of inflation increases, assets and currencies also start to devalue. With central banks asset-buying so heavily via large quantitative easing programs across the world this essentially ends up diluting the value of the currency. If you look back on the great financial crisis of 2008 you can

10,000 jobs in North America, or 26.3 percent of its global workforce, to save money after the coronavirus shutdowns paralyzed travel and crippled the economy.

Chapter 11 is a mechanism that allows a company that is no longer able to repay its debt to restructure itself without creditors. The Wall Street Journal reported Friday that Hertz held debts of roughly \$19 billion,

in addition to nearly 700,000 vehicles sitting idle because of the coronavirus.

"The financial reorganization will provide Hertz a path toward a more robust financial structure that best positions the Company for the future as it navigates what could be a prolonged travel and overall global economic recovery," the Hertz statement said.



SAN FRANCISCO: A sign is posted in front of a Hertz car sales and rental office in South San Francisco, California. The car rental company Hertz, hard hit by the global coronavirus pandemic, has filed for bankruptcy in the United States and Canada, the company announced Friday. — AFP

Virus-hit Hertz goes bust in US and Canada

WASHINGTON: Global car rental company Hertz became the latest economic casualty of the coronavirus pandemic Friday, filing for bankruptcy in the US and Canada after more than a century in business.

"The impact of COVID-19 on travel demand was sudden and dramatic, causing an abrupt decline in the Company's revenue and future bookings," Hertz said in a press release.

Hertz said it took "immediate action" to prioritize the health and safety of employees and customers and eliminate "all non-essential spending". "However, uncertainty remains as to when revenue will return and when the used-car market will fully re-open for sales, which necessitated today's action," it said.

Its main international operating regions, including Europe, Australia and New Zealand, were not included in the US Chapter 11 filing. Hertz had already cut

US shale bust slams rural economies

DEWITT COUNTY, Texas: Royalties from oil pumped on Paul Ruckman's land allowed the South Texas retiree to build a six-bedroom, seven-bathroom vacation home. He had plenty left over, and donated some of it to Helena, Texas, an 1800s ghost town that draws hundreds to historic buildings and gunfight re-enactments.

The worst oil bust in decades has slashed the bounty that flowed to millions of rural Americans like Ruckman, who said his royalty checks have plummeted 70 percent since January. "I imagine they're going to be dropping quite a bit more," said Ruckman, who owns the land with his brothers.

The bust has erased tens of thousands of jobs in the drilling and service sectors, dried up local tax revenues and charitable largess that flowed along with crude oil to Texas, North Dakota and Oklahoma.

Thanks to modern drilling technology, shale has turned the United States into the world's No. 1 energy producer, pumping as much as 13 million barrels per day (bpd) before prices crashed. It added about a percentage point to US GDP between 2010 and 2015. Shale-related jobs lifted the employment rate in Texas and North Dakota to a multiple of the national average.

In DeWitt County, Texas, 80 miles (129 km) southeast of San Antonio, incomes shot up to sixth highest among the state's 254 counties at the peak of the shale boom in 2014 from 116th a decade ago, based on US tax data.

Shale oil fed a global glut. OPEC and allied producers supported prices by cutting output, but this year Saudi Arabia and Russia briefly pumped more. Then fuel demand collapsed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Oil prices are about half January's level, and many shale producers have shut wells. US output could fall about 2 million bpd this year and next, Bank of America has estimated.

Mailbox money

Ruckman is among 12 million US mineral owners who collect "mailbox money," or payments for oil and gas extracted from their land. He declined to say how much his property drew, but residents in the heart of Texas' Eagle Ford shale got bigger royalties than many, able to negotiate richer leases because the region came later to the boom.

Royalties, which can range from 12.5 percent to 25 percent of the value of oil and gas pumped, helped revitalize DeWitt and other communities in oil patches across the United States.

John Baen, a Texas college professor who owns mineral rights in South Texas, collected as much as \$100,000 a month in recent years. The payments have dwindled to \$6,000 and by August, he said, "I'll be lucky to get anything." The average oil-land owner collects about \$500 a month, according to the National Association of Royalty Owners, but that will not last. April's price crash was so sharp, falling at one point into negative territory, that minerals holder Jubilee Royalty Holdings received a \$1 check that month from Exxon Mobil.

The shale boom paid off debt from restoring DeWitt's pink granite and sandstone courthouse and expanding the jail. Oil helped finance the area's Boys and Girls Club, which provides activities for area children. It brought jobs that cut DeWitt's unemployment rate to 2.6 percent in February from 8 percent a decade earlier. During that time, oil and gas jobs here roughly doubled, according to the Texas Independent Producers & Royalty Owners Association.—Reuters

Business

Italy's cafes, shops caught between rock and hard place

Poor funds, new sanitary rules represent brakes to reopening

ROME: The reopening of Italy's restaurants, cafes and stores earlier this week brought hopes of a return to normality for many Italians after a punishing two-month coronavirus lockdown.

But the picture is not so bright. In a sign of further trouble ahead for Italy's economy, many of these establishments remain shut as insufficient funds, new sanitary rules or a lack of clientele represent serious brakes to reopening.

Italy's small and medium-sized business association, Confesercenti, found in a survey published on Saturday that nearly a third of the million establishments allowed to reopen on Monday said they would not.

'Insurmountable problem'

For 68 percent, reopening would not be profitable. Thirteen percent said they had health and safety concerns and an equal number said government directives were too vague.

"For businesses, reopening is a race against time and obstacles," wrote the group, which called for "direct economic aid." "Entrepreneurs fear the impact of the rigidity of the guidelines on activities, and remaining squeezed between the increase in operating costs and the foreseeable drop in revenues," Confesercenti said.

New regulations - which can result in fines if not followed - are particularly hard to respect for smaller establishments, Confesercenti's Valerio Maccari said. "The typical Roman trattoria, for example, does not have much room and in this case ensuring physical distance becomes an insurmountable problem," he said. The rules include sanitary measures such as setting up tables with 1 metre (3.3 feet) of distance between them and twice-daily cleaning of the establishment, as well as masks and gloves for workers. But restaurants also have to contend with more paperwork, such as taking down names and phone numbers of customers for easier tracking in the case of an eventual coronavirus case.

In Rome, restaurant owner Tatjana Pavelic said earlier this week she was opening just one of the four restaurants she operates along a usually busy street leading to the Pantheon. Tourists were nowhere to be seen, but her lunch traffic from local clients was also disrupted because of people still working from home, she said.

Bankrupt tomorrow?

"We have so many clients who work in offices," said Pavelic. "And tourism hasn't started even for Italians."



ROME: People enjoy a drink at a bar terrace in the Ponte Milvio district of Rome on Thursday as the country eases its lockdown after over two months. — AFP

Pavelic said she had asked for a reduction on her rents, which are based on the amount of foot traffic, but was still awaiting an answer. Public anger is mounting. Throughout the capital, protest posters are seen in many shop windows: "Without government help, we can NOT reopen".

In Milan on Saturday, small shop owners and taxi drivers held a protest, saying the government had offered no concrete measures to help them. Many are calling for a hiatus in taxes to help them get through the difficult period. "I'm not opening today to go bankrupt tomorrow," read some of their banners.

"All of us here want to work," shouted one protester into a megaphone. "But we need support to do so."

A survey by the Italian Federation of Public Establishments (Fipe) on April 4 found that 96 percent

of bars, restaurants and similar businesses considered governmental support insufficient.

They cited the need for immediate liquidity to cover the shortfalls in revenue, or credit with zero or subsidized interest, as well as the cancellation of taxes due. At the other end of the Italian boot, in Avola, Sicily, restaurant owner Gianpaolo Molisena has decided to remain closed for now, one of the approximately 5,000 such establishments keeping their doors shut in Sicily, a quarter of the total. Were he to reopen, it would cost Molisena "100 (euros) to collect 30," he said. The restaurant usually employs six people.

"Besides, the spirit of the restaurant is not there, the charm of dining with friends ... is lost with all these rules," he said. "The customers feel under surveillance." — AFP



Tourism sector provides 15% jobs in Italy

"Were I to open tomorrow, I wouldn't have one client," said Pietro Lepore, owner of Harry's Bar on Rome's tony Via Veneto. "There are 12 luxury hotels on the street. Sixty percent of my business comes from their clientele and they're all closed," Lepore, whose 24 employees are all furloughed, told AFP.

It is the same from Rome to Florence and Venice, where the spokeswoman for the city's shopkeepers' association, Cristina Giussani, mused whether cafes and restaurants should open "for seagulls and pigeons" given the utter lack of tourists.

Italy's economy is highly dependent on tourism. The sector makes up 13 percent of the country's output while employing about 4.2 million Italians, or 15 percent of jobs in Italy. Some are counting on the reopening of Italy's borders to Europeans in early June as a crucial turning point. But many wonder whether tourists will feel comfortable enough to travel, or whether they'll have the money to do so.

NBK launches Eid guide, covering key services

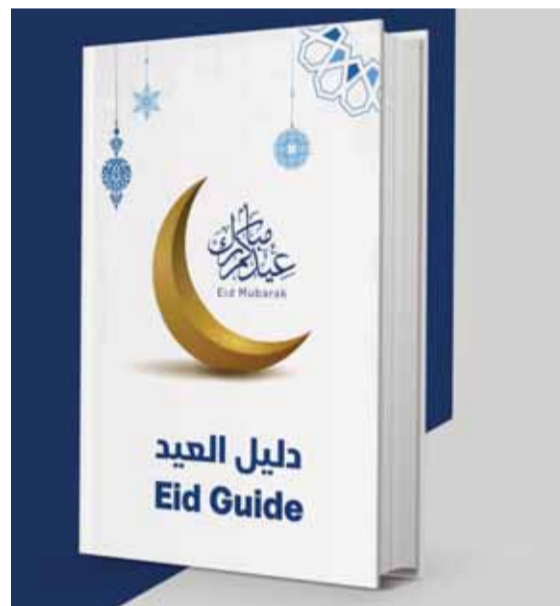
KUWAIT: Since the outset of the global health crisis, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) has been providing its customers with distinguished services, ensuring that the bank is always by their side at all times while enabling them to complete their banking transactions without disruption. In addition, the bank has provided customers with all the needed support and health guidance, as well as entertainment content through its channels on social media.

On the occasion of Eid Al-Fitr, NBK wanted to greet customers in its own way. The bank has prepared a guide showcasing the key services that customers can benefit from during Eid, by introducing some applications to provide them with various services, such as methods of sending the Eidiya, ways to display the Eid table and household arrangements, video chat applications to send greetings to family and friends, as well as entertainment apps for children.

Commenting on this topic, Hisham Al-Nusif, Deputy General Manager of Consumer Banking Group, National Bank of Kuwait, said: "Since the outbreak of the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19), NBK has been working to provide support to customers by all means. And as part of our endeavors to offer them a top-notch banking experience, not only by meeting their banking needs, we have gone the extra mile to provide customers with all the required support, as well as various important guidelines, which witnessed remarkable interaction from customers."

"Today, we wanted to send greetings to our customers in our own way through this guide, which we hope will help them spend special moments in celebrating the traditional joyful times of the Eid in spite of these exceptional circumstances, while adhering to all precautionary measures to keep them safe," Al-Nusif continued.

"During this period, we worked also on providing



entertainment content suitable for different age groups on our social media accounts nbkgroup, where we posted various interesting topics ranging from cooking to home workouts and training sessions, given by a number of experts in various fields. We also offered Zeina Coloring Book to kids that can be downloaded from our website, which is also an amusing way to develop their skills," he added.

Al-Nusif concluded: "We extend our greetings to all customers, wishing them good health and safety. We also hope that this health crisis will end soon, and we promise our customers with more distinguished services during the coming period."

It's worth mentioning that NBK has provided customers with a special guide for all the bank's digital services, where customers can simply click on the service to view the tutorials to get familiar with the services, as well as a guide for the key services available during full lockdown, in order to meet all customers' essential needs and health services they may require.

And in a step to reinforce its leadership in providing cutting-edge services to its customers, NBK has updated many services on NBK Mobile Banking App enabling customers to make their banking transactions quickly and easily. Besides, as part of its endeavors to offer convenient and safe services to its customers, NBK provided, for the first time in Kuwait, a mobile branch comprised of a truck with ATM and ITM devices, which reaches customers at their doorsteps to make their banking transactions while adhering to precautionary health measures to keep them safe.

struction site where more than 10,000 workers are building a shipyard for LNG production facilities.

Russian authorities say 2,259 coronavirus cases have been identified there, while the entire Murmansk region has only 575 other cases. Seven people have died in the region, including a woman who was working at the construction site.

A cruise ship with a capacity of 2,500 passengers called the Princess Anastasia has docked at the site to isolate healthy workers, and a mobile hospital has been built to treat the sick. Construction work is still continuing at the site linked to the huge Arctic LNG 2, which involves several partners, including France's Total.

Sabetta LNG plant

On the Yamal Peninsula in the Siberian Arctic, 1,335 out of 1,989 confirmed cases have been people infected at numerous oil and gas extraction sites, according to authorities. One major site is Yamal LNG, a huge Novatek plant at Sabetta which employs around 30,000 people. In late April, the airport which provides the only access to Sabetta was closed by the authorities to stop the virus spreading.—AFP

Moody's affirms ABK ratings at 'A2'; outlook 'stable'

KUWAIT: Moody's investors Service, has affirmed the long-term deposit ratings of ABK at 'A2' with a 'stable' outlook in its most recent credit opinion issued this week.

Moody's said that ABK's baa3 standalone BCA reflects the Bank's strong capitalization, substantial loan-loss reserves and stable funding base with adequate liquidity buffers. The Bank's asset quality improved in 2019. ABK's pre-provision income has been stable, however, high provisioning costs led to modest bottom line profitability. The stable outlook on ABK's deposit ratings reflects the benefits stemming from regional diversification. In closing, Moody's confirmed that the Bank's NPLs are low and well provisioned. ABK maintains relatively strong capital metrics, allowing the bank a solid absorption buffer. ABK's Capital Adequacy Ratio was 18.6 percent as of the end of December 2019.

ABK's revenues before provisions showed financial flexibility, while the cost of higher provisions led to medium profitability in 2019. ABK has consistently been recognized with solid credit ratings in Kuwait by major rating agencies, Moody's & Fitch.

Debt default looms for Argentina

BEUNOS AIRES: Argentina was teetering on the brink of a second default this century on Friday as the deadline for a \$500 million bond interest repayment approached. The crisis-wracked country was already trying to renegotiate its crippling debt before its economy was hit—like others all over the world—by the coronavirus pandemic.

"Barring an eleventh hour deal out of the blue, Argentina's ninth sovereign default will be confirmed on Friday," said analysts Capital Economics.

On Thursday, the economy ministry announced that it had postponed talks for a second time with international creditors on the restructuring of \$66 billion of debt, this time until June 2.

The negotiations were supposed to be completed by May 8 but had already been extended until Friday. Although it is one of the world leaders in food exports, Argentina has already defaulted on its debt eight times in its history, the last of those being in 2001 when it owed \$100 billion. That triggered a painful social and economic crisis.

The South American country, which has been in recession for two years, currently owes \$324 billion, amounting to around 90 percent of its GDP.

'Nothing of substance'

Argentina's main group of creditors is demanding "a direct and immediate discussion" on its restructure plans. "The group is happy to see that Argentina has expressed its intention to work with the creditors, but actions speak louder than words," said the Ad Hoc group made up of investment funds including BlackRock and Fidelity. "Over the last month, Argentina has communicated virtually nothing of substance to its creditors." —AFP



3,000 participate in Ooredoo's gaming tournament

KUWAIT: In tandem with its commitment to embracing digitalization and leading the way in meeting the growing demands for online digital users in Kuwait, Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, organized the ProPing Online Gaming Tournament from April 26 to May 21, in collaboration with Blink Kuwait, the professional E-sport organizer, and leader in the PC and console gaming business in Kuwait.

The tournament took place virtually; and more than 3,000 gaming enthusiasts competed in the online game 'Call of Duty - Modern Warfare' from their homes. Valuable prizes were awarded to the top 3 winners. Team LGND won first place and was awarded with a KD600 voucher from Blink, and each member of the team won a one year membership in the ProPing internet service provided by FASTTelco; Team Grey won second place and was awarded with a KD 300 voucher from Blink, and each member of the team won a six month membership in the ProPing internet service provided by FASTTelco.

Commenting on the tournament, Nouf Al-Meshaan, Director of Marketing at Ooredoo Kuwait said, "Ooredoo continues to prove its commitment to embracing digitalization and leads the way in meeting the growing demands for online digital services in Kuwait, especially in the fast-paced telecom industry where customers need reliable, consistent, and fast internet. This is especially crucial nowadays when digital entertainment content is witnessing substantial growth in the region due to the rising popularity of smart devices, as well as the increase in gaming and streaming. Al-Meshaan added, this new service perfectly complements the company's core values of caring, connecting and challenging, while also upholding its commitment to providing customers with services and plans that match their expectations and lifestyle at home.

In addition to the tournament, FASTTelco, a subsidiary of Ooredoo Kuwait and the only provider of ProPing; which is a tailored-made internet service for pro-gamers is launched exclusive new sets of Pro Gaming PCs and gaming accessories bundles in cooperation with Blink. FASTTelco also provided Shamel Home ProPing packages starting at KD18 per month with tailor-made wireless and fixed internet bundle for pro-gamers, to provide an unparalleled gaming experience.

ProPing Online Gaming Tournament is aligned with the company's 'Be Safe. Be Home. Be Online' campaign, featuring an array of digital offers and services designed to support customers and to ensure they are well connected and informed during the COVID-19 outbreak in the country.

Oil and gas sites hit by virus in Russia, Kazakhstan

MOSCOW: Coronavirus outbreaks have swept through several oil, gas and mining sites in Russia and Kazakhstan, where major international firms from Total to Chevron and local giants like Gazprom are operating. Thousands have been infected at several sites and at least two have died, as operators scramble to contain the disease's deadly spread. Workers live in crowded conditions, ideal for the spread of the virus, and many of the sites are remote—some reachable only by air.

Here is what we know about the outbreaks at several of the sites, the region's new virus hotbeds.

Belokamenka shipyard

Two of the sites with major outbreaks are run by Russia's second largest natural gas company, Novatek. Belokamenka in the Arctic Murmansk region is a con-

Madagascar's 'green gold' against COVID-19 seeks nod beyond Africa

ANTANANARIVO: A drink made from a bright-green fern-like plant is being promoted in African countries as the go-to cure for COVID-19. But detractors, with undisguised scorn, dismiss claims for the concoction as at best useless - and at worst dangerous. Madagascar President Andry Rajoelina is the promoter-in-chief of the substance, marketed as Covid-Organics and sold in the form of a herbal infusion.

Asserting that the Madagascar brew has the potential to "change history", Rajoelina has widely distributed it in his Indian Ocean island nation and exported it to many parts of Africa. The East African countries of Tanzania and the Comoros are among enthusiastic customers as well as Guinea-Bissau and Equatorial Guinea on the Atlantic coast. Guinea-Bissau President Umaro Sissoco Embalo made a point of personally taking delivery of his country's Covid-Organics order at the airport. Artemisia annua has a long history in its native China, where scientists discovered an active ingredient that made the plant a front-line weapon in the fight against malaria.

Flying off shelves

Covid-Organics seems to be selling like hotcakes in Madagascar, costing 30 euro cents (35 US) for a 33-centilitre (11-ounce) bottle. In Senegal, Belgian agronomist Pierre Van Damme markets the product under the label Le Lion Vert (The Green Lion). "Since the start of the epidemic, demand for artemisia has gone through the roof," Van Damme said. "But since the Madagascar president's declarations it's been crazy." Sales jumped 15-fold in a few weeks, forcing Van Damme to hire eight staff to handle some 2,000 orders a day. As demand surges for

the purported coronavirus remedy, prices have followed suit. Ibrahima Diop, a producer in the Dakar area, says the retail price has soared by two-thirds. "I'm swamped," grinned Haoua Wardougou, an apothecary in a working-class district of the Chad capital N'Djamena. "I have lots of customers who want to buy some, but I'm out of stock."

Western doubts

The counterpart to this enthusiasm is the cool reception that the drink has met in the West. The substance has proven effectiveness against malaria, but no clinical trials have tested it against COVID-19, either as a cure or as a preventative. In recent weeks, both the World Health Organization (WHO) and Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have underscored the need for empirical testing of local formulas to demonstrate they are safe and effective as claimed. "We would be very proud if a solution in this war against COVID-19 comes from an African country," said John Nkengasong, head of the Gabon-based Africa CDC. "But we must be methodical before approving such a remedy."

Some African countries are exercising caution, handing over their stocks of Covid-Organics for expert analysis. "They will be subjected to the same process as all other products before they are put on the market," said Boss Mustapha, Nigeria's point man in the fight against coronavirus. "There will be no exceptions." Even in Madagascar, doubts persist. The dean of the medical faculty in the eastern city of Toamasina, Stephane Ralandison, warned against methods that were "not fully scientific" behind the Covid-Organics' launch.

"I am extremely cautious," said sociologist Marcel Razafimahatratra, asking why the drink was not used in China, where the pandemic originated and where artemisia has long been used in traditional medicine. Clearly thrilled by his new continental fame, Rajoelina is an unabashed defender of Covid-Organics, charging that the West scorns the concoction because of its condescending attitude toward traditional African medicine. "If it was a European country that had actually discovered this remedy, would there be so much doubt? I don't think so," he told French media. For evidence he cites Madagascar's coronavirus statistics: 405 cases including two deaths and 131 recoveries, according to the official count.

'Green gold'

Rajoelina is touting artemisia as the new "green gold" for Madagascar, one of the world's poorest countries. "Life will change for all Madagascans," he said, noting that rice fetches \$350 (320 euros) a ton, while artemisia changes hands at nearly 10 times as much at \$3,000 a ton. A Madagascar-based company, Bionexx, has been producing artemisia since 2005 to fight malaria. Its CEO Charles Gblain is also convinced of a lucrative future for the crop. "This plant is a weed that can grow anywhere," he said. "The only problem is to grow it in conditions that will make it competitive with Chinese rivals."

Bionexx is working to develop a hybrid to maximize the strength and effectiveness of wild Artemisia annua, with researcher Solofa Rasamiharimanana estimating that the quest could take four years. But many growers are far from convinced of its market potential. At the vil-

lage of Ambohioky on the outskirts of Antananarivo, farmers tempted by the crop quickly abandoned the effort. "We dropped it because of the prices," said one of them, Louis Jean Patrice Rakotoninaina. "We were paid 1,050 ariary (27 cents, 25 euro cents) per kilo of dried artemisia while we expected to get 3,000 ariary."

Another, Eveline Raharimalala, said anything below 15,000 ariary was not worth growers' while. She noted that artemisia takes six months to grow - three times longer than other crops. Bionexx's Gblain disputes the argument, saying: "If our prices weren't attractive, we wouldn't have 16,000 farmers working with us." But one of the footsoldiers in this army of producers, Joseph Rakotondramana, said a more important factor in growing the plant was to have a secure market. "We don't grow artemisia for its price (but) because it's a safe product with less risk of loss and zero need to stock," said Rakotondramana, who has worked with Bionexx for five years.

Gblain for his part believes he is looking at Madagascar's next vanilla - the crop that accounts for 80 percent of world production. His ambition is to make his business, which currently produces 2,500 tonnes of artemisia per year, one of the world's top three producers alongside Chinese rivals. Razafimahatratra, the sociologist, has his doubts. Rather than banking on a green miracle, he says, the Madagascar government should focus on ensuring food security for the former French colony's 26 million people, 90 percent of whom live in grinding poverty. "Instead of importing 300,000 to a million tons of rice per year, the country should work to close this gap," he said. — AFP

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Lifestyle | Features

Saudi Arabia's first female director **Haifaa Al-Mansour** to premiere **'The Perfect Candidate'** on OSN Store this Eid

Saudi Arabian director Haifaa Al-Mansour.

This month, OSN the region's leading entertainment network is bringing the ground-breaking movie, 'The Perfect Candidate' exclusively to OSN Store. Based on a female doctor who runs for office in Saudi Arabia, her campaign gathers unexpected momentum in this moving drama. Available to buy or rent from Sunday 23rd May, this film will leave viewers feeling both inspired and empowered.

Directed by Haifaa Al-Mansour, one of the most significant cinematic figures in the Kingdom — 'The Perfect Candidate' certainly lives up to its hype. The film tells the story of a Young doctor Maryam (Mila Al-Zahrani's debut) who surprises everyone by standing as a candidate for the local municipality in Saudi Arabia. Maryam's only desire is for the dirt road outside the local hospital to be surfaced, but no one takes this ambitious professional woman's modest political mission seriously.

Al-Mansour depicts Maryam's political mission as a mul-

ti-layered family drama. She lovingly outlines how the new candidate is supported by her sisters and how her father, a musician, worries about her progressive values. On tour with his band in conservative areas, he realizes Maryam's mission is about creative openness and freedom of expression.

After Al-Mansour directed the film WADJDA in 2012, making her the first director to ever shoot a film in its entirety in the Kingdom, she quickly found herself making movies in Hollywood. For her latest release, 'The Perfect Candidate', she returned to Saudi Arabia for a touching story about a woman trying to break the glass ceiling.

Haifaa Al-Mansour, Director of 'The Perfect Candidate' said: "The pace of modernization in Saudi Arabia is incredibly rapid right now. We are seeing so many changes, happening so fast, that it is hard for people to fully grasp the full extent of what is happening. I wanted to capture this moment through my film, of a society in transition, and the ways these

changes are perceived from people." With the film being nominated in the Venice Film Festival for Best Film, FEST International Film Festival for Best Film Main Program and the London Film Festival—'The Perfect Candidate' is a must-see.

The management of OSN said: "OSN is all about bringing exclusive entertainment to the region and we are proud to introduce 'The Perfect Candidate' to our exciting lineup this Eid. As a leading industry player, we are committed to celebrating local talent and making their content accessible to our customers across the Middle East. 'The Perfect Candidate' is a stunning, feel-good movie based on hope and determination which couldn't be timelier."

The film will be available to Buy & Keep or Rent for 48 hours on OSN Store from Sunday 23rd May and will launch later this year on linear channels.

'Real Lord of the Flies' shipwreck to become Hollywood movie

The remarkable story of six boys stranded on a remote island that has been dubbed the "Real Lord of the Flies" is to become a Hollywood movie, it was announced Friday. Dutch historian Rutger Bregman pieced together the true tale of how a group of Tongan teenagers ended up shipwrecked together in the Pacific for 15 months, after stealing a fisherman's boat in the 1960s. A newspaper article Bregman penned to promote his book "Humankind" went viral two weeks ago, sparking a fierce bidding war among Tinseltown studios.

"The Real Lord of the Flies will become a movie! The last two weeks have been a crazy rollercoaster," tweeted Bregman Friday. "Lots of Hollywood studios suddenly wanted to buy the rights to the story of Sione, Luke, Mano, Tevita, Fatai and Kolo," he added. Unlike in William Golding's classic novel "Lord of the Flies," the real-life boys peacefully co-operated during their time on the uninhabited rocky islet of 'Ata. "The kids worked together in teams of two, got a fire started and never let it go out, and stayed friends this whole time," Bregman wrote in an earlier tweet.

They survived on fish, coconuts, birds and eggs, drew up strict rosters for their duties, and even created a makeshift gym and badminton court. Rutger's article published by The Guardian describes how the author tracked down an Australian ship captain who miraculously spotted and rescued the boys. It has reportedly received 8 million views. After interest from "a lot of studios" who "bombarded" him with inquiries, Rutger spoke with the captain and four surviving castaways on a Zoom call. They decided to sell the rights to "The Revenant" and "12 Years a Slave" producer New Regency, and share the proceeds, Rutger wrote. Hollywood trade publication Deadline said "a low seven-figure deal" was being negotiated amid competing bids from the likes of Netflix and MGM. New Regency did not immediately respond to an AFP request for comment. —AFP



In this file photo taken on January 24, 2012 Uggie, a Jack Russell Terrier, visits The Empire State Building with his trainer Omar von Muller in New York City.



In this file photo Uggie, the canine star from the film "The Artist" walks the red carpet outside Grauman's Chinese Theatre to cast his paw prints in cement during a ceremony marking his retirement from show business in Hollywood.



In this file photo Uggie the dog from winner of Best Picture, "The Artist" poses with cast members in the press room at the 84th Annual Academy Awards in Hollywood, California.—AFP photos

UGGIE THE STAR OF 'THE ARTIST' WINS GREATEST MOVIE MUTT AWARD

Uggie the adorable terrier from the Oscar-winning film "The Artist" was posthumously awarded the Palm Dog of Palm Dogs Friday for the best canine performance ever at the Cannes film festival. With the film world in mourning after Cannes was cancelled because of the coronavirus, the ceremony was conducted virtually, with Dash — Uggie's old friend and understudy, who also appeared in the 2011 silent comedy — accepting the diamante-encrusted collar on his behalf. Uggie passed away five years ago aged 13 but not before charming the world after making his first big splash at Cannes.

The Palm Dog is the doggie version of the festival's top prize, the Palme d'Or, and almost as sought after, with Quentin Tarantino, Noah Baumbach and Jim Jarmusch among a galaxy of top-dog directors who have emerged from the pack with the highly-prized collar between their teeth. Cannes would have reached its climax this weekend had the coronavirus not struck, completely overturning the movie calendar and now even calling the Oscars into question.

Cans of tinned rat
Palm Dog founder Toby Rose told AFP that he

decided to honour Uggie not just for being the greatest Hollywood hound in the Palm Dog's two-decade history, but for proudly wearing the collar on his worldwide publicity tour for the film. "Every single year a journalist will pose the question, 'Is there going to be a year with (films with) no dogs?' We been doing this 19, coming on 20 years and dogs and directors never fail to come up with the goods," he added.

Indeed Tarantino admitted that he had his eye on the collar last year for "my wonderful actress Brandy", a pit bull who liked to chomp cans of tinned rat and who savaged the baddies in the gory final scene of "Once Upon A Time... In Hollywood". "I'm not going to give this to her — it'll go on my mantelpiece," he proudly told AFP after the dog who very nearly upstaged Brad Pitt won the award.

Uggie's trainer Omar Von Muller, who also worked on "Once Upon a Time in Hollywood", said winning the Palm Dog was the launchpad for "The Artist" and its fairytale Oscar success. "At the time we really didn't know how the movie would do and that's when the whole thing started going everywhere," he told AFP from his home north of Los Angeles, which is festooned with portraits of Uggie.

'He loved the attention'

"Uggie was a very, very special friend. He was a family member... He loved to work and the attention he got on set. He will be in our hearts forever," Von Muller said. "Things like the Palm Dog are very important for us because it recognises the work" dog trainers do, he said. Van Muller said they were no secrets to training dogs other than having heart and passion and making sure the dogs "enjoy what they're doing without ever being pressured... It starts very slowly, with a lot of patience and a lot love for the dogs."

Rose said the Palm Dog has since expanded its scope with its "Dogmanitarian" prize, honouring among others the British social realist master Ken Loach, who has made three-legged dogs a fixture in his films. "It represents the underdog," for which Loach has fought throughout his long career, Rose said. "Ken was so fabulously embracing of the idea and even told us about the castings," he told AFP. Can you imagine, Rose joked, "having to say to a three-legged dog, 'Sorry you ain't got the role.'" —AFP



In this file photo Actor Maurice Benard, actress Nancy Lee Grahn and actor Steve Burton speak onstage at the 'General Hospital' panel.—AFP photos



In this file photo Actor Anthony Geary (left) and actress Francis attend The Paley Center for Media Presents "General Hospital: Celebrating 50 years and Looking Forward" at The Paley Center for Media in Beverly Hills, California.

Senegal TV uses soap to fight coronavirus

Senegal's latest TV drama star is a fictional doctor who provides coronavirus advice — a far cry from characters in the West African country's usual fare of infidelity-themed soap operas. Since late April, a short television show in the Wolof language dubbed "The Virus," has aired on social media and on a private channel, focusing on the day-to-day of life during the pandemic. "We wanted to make five- to eight-minute TV films to show what to do and what not to do to avoid the coronavirus," said the programme's director, Mohamed Moustapha Kante.

Wearing a facemask on his cluttered set in the capital city Dakar, Kante explained that the idea behind the series was to go beyond stilted government slogans such "wash your hands" or "cough into your elbow". The 30-episode series is being broadcast on ITV, one of the country's most popular channels. It started airing at the beginning of Ramadan and broadcasts in the evening, when the Muslim faithful break

their fast, and when many Senegalese like to sit in front of the box. In "The Virus," the fictional Doctor Diouf appears at the end of episodes constructed around daily life in average Senegalese homes, to proffer his advice. "The messages vary from day to day," said Alioune Thiam, the actor who plays Dr. Diouf.

In one episode, for example, a young man criticises his sister who is too engrossed by social media to listen to health warnings about COVID-19. She learns her lesson when she eventually catches the virus, however. "We're getting feedback from viewers," says Thiam. "For example, someone told us he didn't know that diarrhoea was one of the symptoms". Senegalese authorities have recorded some 1,200 coronavirus cases to date, with 33 fatalities, a low number compared to Europe and the United States. —AFP



Director Mohamed Moustapha Kanté (left) directs Khalifa Diouf (center), who plays the role of Lif in the television show "The Virus", during filming in Dakar.—AFP

VIRUS TRIPS UP US SOAP OPERA 'GENERAL HOSPITAL', 57 YEARS ON

Will Michael get full custody of his son Wiley? Will Sasha's romantic woes lead her down the road to addiction? Will Sonny and Julian battle it out once again? Fans of "General Hospital" are awaiting answers to these questions — but they could end up waiting a long time, as the last new episode of the beloved US soap opera airs Thursday. For the first time since its debut in 1963, and after more than 14,500 episodes, the ABC program will be on forced hiatus due to disruptions in production sparked by the coronavirus crisis.

"I've been watching this show since like I was maybe eight or nine years old," says Tiana Jones, a 29-year-old who lives in New York's Queens neighbourhood. "So not having that key part of my everyday life is hard." Filming on "General Hospital" came to a screeching halt in March, as it did for the vast majority of TV shows and films in progress, when businesses moved into lockdown mode. Social distancing on a soap set? Impossible. The team behind the show re-edited episodes, adding lengthy flashbacks to make their new material last longer, and aired reruns of classic episodes on

Fridays — but the well has run dry. "GH" is not alone. "The Bold and the Beautiful" and "The Young and the Restless" — which air on CBS — ran out of shows last month. That leaves NBC's "Days of Our Lives" — which shoots episodes months in advance — as the last soap standing through the summer and into the fall.

'Me time'

Soap operas began as radio shows before migrating to television. Storylines — which once focused largely on romantic hijinks and family drama — have expanded to include everything from the AIDS crisis to transgender acceptance to #MeToo harassment. "It's a daily habit... an hour of me time," says 65-year-old Donna Walsh Costello, who had been watching the show more or less since the beginning. "General Hospital" regularly draws slightly more than two million viewers a day. But with more people stuck at home, its ratings soared — nearly to the top of the daytime charts.

ABC did not respond to requests for comment about when production could resume on "General Hospital," which

boasts famous alumni like Demi Moore and Ricky Martin. California Governor Gavin Newsom said Wednesday he would soon unveil plans for the entertainment industry, but noted there were likely to be delays in Los Angeles.

Tradition

For Mary Sue Price, who worked as a writer on "General Hospital" from the late 1990s to 2012, the show's enduring popularity stems from its "tradition of telling really strong stories" and the longevity of its characters. Show stalwarts include Kin Shriner and Genie Francis, who arrived in Port Charles — the fictitious New York city where the show takes place — in 1977 as Scott and Laura. "There's a sort of continuity to it that people find really comforting and really reassuring," Price said. Michael Maloney, who writes for the Soap Hub website, says soaps "offer consistency in a world that doesn't always have consistency." —AFP



Snake hunter Amy Siewe pulls out a dead python from a plastic bag in the backyard of a house in Delray Beach.



Brian Wood makes snake skin face masks inside his workshop in Delray Beach.



Snake hunter Jim McCartney pulls out a live Iguana from a cage in Delray Beach.—AFP photos



Brian Wood makes snake skin face masks inside his workshop in Delray Beach.



Brian Wood makes snake skin face masks inside his workshop in Delray Beach.

MAKING MASKS FROM FLORIDA PYTHON SKIN



A dead python is kept inside a cool box at the backyard of a house in Delray Beach.

A Florida craftsman has come up with a novel way of tackling both the coronavirus pandemic and the problem of invasive pythons and iguanas that damage the state's fragile ecosystem. Brian Woods, the 63-year-old owner of All American Gator Products, has turned his hand to designing face masks made out reptile skin. "I took something that's very serious and turned it into a fashion statement," he said at his workshop in Dania Beach, 25 miles (40 kilometers) north of Miami.

Woods got his inspiration from a curious source — a meme he saw of a horse wearing a woman's bra as a face mask. He asked his wife if he could borrow one of hers to test if the concept would work. He now sells python skin face masks on his Facebook page for \$90. Snake hunter Amy Siewe arrived at Woods' home with

a giant python for skinning. "They're wreaking havoc on the Everglades," she said, referring to the vast wetlands that occupy much of southern Florida. "They get to be between 18 and 20 feet (5.5 to 6 meters) long and they eat everything from rats to deer."

The pythons were probably introduced to Florida as exotic pets toward the end of the last century and released into the Everglades, where they have no predators. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission pays hunters a bounty to capture the snakes. Iguanas likely also came to Florida as pets before being released into the wild, where they thrive in the balmy climate.—AFP

Gobble gobble: Pac-Man turns 40

Forty years ago, a new video game featuring a bright yellow, dot-chomping, ghost-dodging character called Pac-Man appeared in Tokyo. It would become the most successful arcade game of all time. The hero — shaped like a mouth opening and closing — races around a maze noisily gobbling dots and occasionally fruit for extra points, all the while avoiding four cunning ghosts named Blinky, Pinky, Inky and Clyde.

As every Pac-Man player knows, the greatest joy comes from turning the tables by munching a power pellet, sending the ghosts fleeing in all directions as they suddenly become edible themselves. The game was originally called Puck-Man (an onomatopoeic play on the Japanese word "paku", meaning to gobble) but it was changed when it launched in the United States for fear gamers would inevitably change the "P" to an "F".

Game designer Toru Iwatani came up with the shape for the adorable hero when he took a small slice from a pizza and realised the remainder looked like a wide-open mouth. Pac-Man was aimed at women and couples — a different audience to the violent alien shoot-em-ups popular in Japanese arcades at the time, Iwatani explained in a 2010 interview with Wired magazine.



The first edition was placed in a cinema in the trendy Tokyo district of Shibuya rather than a male-dominated arcade to test the target audience, he said. "The women and couples were very happy about the machine, very excited. They came up to it and put their hands on it, so we thought that our target concept had been very much in sync and correct," he said.

Hard-core gamers turned up their noses but "it was for people who didn't play games on a daily basis — women, children, the elderly". The idea of Pac-Man turning the tables on his spooky tormentors came from the cartoon series Popeye, where the nautical hero is only able to take on his nemesis Bluto after a healthy dose of spinach, Iwatani explained.

'Tremendously monotonous'

From these humble beginnings, Pac-Man would go on to be recognised by Guinness World Records as the most successful coin-operated arcade game of all time. It has spawned several spin-offs, including "Pac 'n Roll", "Ms. Pac-Man", "Pac-in-Time" and "Pac Panic" — a massive money spinner for creators Bandai Namco.

The firm claims the loveable character has a brand recognition of 90 percent around the world — "one of the most recognised on the planet". To celebrate the game's 30th birthday, Google unveiled its first-ever playable "Doodle" and the internet giant also rolled out a version of the game for its Maps service — turning the real streets of a city into a labyrinth to gobble up pellets and ghosts. According to Wired, the "perfect score" is 3,333,360 points — possible only by getting to the final level 256 without losing a life and eating every dot, fruit and ghost possible. "It was tremendously monotonous," Wired quoted the first record-holder, Billy Mitchell, as saying. Pac-Man's 40th was celebrated with a special Twitter hashtag in Japan, with fans all over the country wishing their hero a happy birthday. "The characters are colourful and cute. It was so fun. I remember I played a lot at my relative's house. Happy birthday Pac-Man!" said one.—AFP

Renowned Egyptian sculptor Adam Henein dies at 91

Prominent Egyptian sculptor Adam Henein, who led the restoration of the Great Sphinx in Giza, died on Friday at the age of 91, the culture ministry announced. The acclaimed artist, who passed away after a struggle with illness, leaves behind a rich legacy of artwork, much of which draws inspiration from Egyptian heritage. "The Egyptian visual arts scene lost a genius," Culture Minister Inas Abdel-Dayem said in a statement, describing Henein as "unique". Henein was born in 1929 in the Bab al-Shaaria district in Cairo to a family of silversmiths and jewellers.

He demonstrated artistic talent from an early age, modelling a clay figure of ancient Egyptian King Ramses II at eight years old. "My father used to display my work in the window of his silver workshop and it received wide acclaim," Henein said in a 2019

documentary by the Bibliotheca Alexandrina. Henein studied at Cairo's School of Fine Arts, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in 1953. He continued his studies in Munich and later lived in Paris for more than two decades before returning to Egypt. In the 1990s, he led the team that restored the Great Sphinx at the Giza plateau near Egypt's famed pyramids.

Henein's home in Giza, which was converted into a museum, boasts a variety of paintings and sculptures. In 1996, he founded the annual Aswan International Sculpture Symposium (AISS), which draws artists from around the world. Henein's work has been exhibited in Egypt, Europe and beyond and he received many awards, including the Egyptian State Merit Award for arts in 1998 and the Mubarak Art Award in 2014.—AFP



Egyptian sculptor Adam Henein

Phantom lock picker of Paris parks becomes folk hero

A mysterious figure who picks the locks of Paris parks at night for people who have been cooped up in the city's tiny apartments has become something of a folk hero. Parks have been chained up in Europe's most densely populated capital since the coronavirus lockdown began more than eight weeks ago. Despite the city's mayor Anne Hidalgo pleading with the government to allow them to reopen if people wore masks, ministers have been unmoved.

But as temperatures nudged towards 30 degrees Celsius (86 degrees Fahrenheit) this week, an amateur lock-picker admitted that he has been opening parks at night to let hard-pressed Parisians sit on the grass and smell the roses. A man calling himself "Jose" told the Parisien daily that he has been liberating parks in the poorer districts of northern and eastern Paris in a series of "Batman" style nocturnal actions. Two hand-

written posters hanging from the railings of the Parc de Belleville on Friday said "Thank you, Jose!", seeming to show that the phantom locker picker has generated a following. Discontent with the closure of parks has been rising since France began to slowly relax its lockdown last week, with the police forced to clear the huge open lawns in front of Les Invalides in central Paris of picnickers twice in two days.

Exodus

Officers had earlier dispersed hundreds of people from the banks of Canal Saint-Martin. Jose, who claims he only picks locks as a hobby and makes an honest living from a "normal job", said: "Paris apartments are very small. We are supposed to be coming out of lockdown, but everything is closed." Almost a quarter of Paris's population escaped the city—often to second homes in the country—during the strictest period of the confinement.

But the city's poor and essential workers were stuck in often tiny flats during one of the sunniest springs on record. Hidalgo, who is fighting a re-election campaign, asked the government to treat parks like the city's streets and allow people to "stroll through them if they were wearing a mask, which should be obligatory". But Health Minister Olivier Veran said the parks should stay shut as long as Paris and its surroundings remain in the "red zone" of infections.—AFP



A Palestinian baker shows trays of traditional date-filled biscuits at a bakery in Jerusalem's Old City ahead of Eid Al-Fitr, a three-day holiday that marks the end of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan.—AFP

Italian woman wins \$1.1 million Picasso in charity draw

An Italian woman has won a Picasso painting worth more than \$1 million in a charity raffle to raise money for village water projects in Africa. The winner of Wednesday's draw at Christie's auction house in Paris was named as Claudia Borgogno, who was gifted the winning ticket. Her prize is Picasso's 1921 oil painting "Nature Morte" (Still Life), which is signed and dated by the artist. The Spanish master's geometric composition representing a piece of newspaper and a glass of absinthe had been valued at one million euros (\$1.1 million).

The "1 Picasso for 100 euros" project organised by French charity Aider les Autres (Help the Others) aims to raise funds for various humanitarian projects. This year's draw, the second with a Picasso prize, was to raise funds for the poverty-fighting agency CARE to finance projects improving access to water for 200,000 villagers in Morocco, Cameroon and Madagascar. More than 51,000 people bought a 100 euro ticket through the project website, raising 5.1 million euros, though far short of the original target of 20 million.

Tickets were bought by people in more than 100 countries, with the majority in France, the United States and Switzerland. "Twenty million euros was very ambitious. With more than five million we achieved an exceptional result for a very complicated operation in a very complicated period," CARE communications director Emanuela Croce told AFP. "We had to reassure that it was a real operation with a real Picasso, it seemed too good to be true."

She welcomed that people had realised "water is crucial for health" during the coronavirus pandemic, which had delayed the draw which was originally due to take place in March. "It is all the more important as one in three people on Earth does not have access to drinking water," she said. The painting's owner, billionaire art collector David Nahmad, will be paid 900,000 euros and the remaining 4.2 million will finance the CARE projects. The first "1 Picasso for 100 euros" raffle in 2013 raised funds to benefit a project in the ancient Lebanese city of Tyre, a UNESCO World Heritage site. The winner was American Jeffrey Gonano from Pennsylvania, who took home Picasso's 1914 work "L'Homme au Gibus" (Man With Opera Hat), valued at more than \$1 million in 2013.—AFP

In the absence of tourists, locals reclaim their cities

BARCELONA: In Barcelona, Laia and her daughter stroll peacefully in Park Guell. At the same time, Mladen savors the silence of the marble alleys of Dubrovnik while Fabiana soaks up the calm of old Lisbon. These three corners of three cities, known for the hustle and clamor of tourists, are unusually tranquil.

The lockdowns caused by the coronavirus pandemic may not have been universally popular but they have had the effect of alleviating, at least temporarily, some of the ills associated with tourism, notably the overcrowding of city centers and a rapid rise in prices and rents.

Park Guell, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the great legacies of modernist architect Antoni Gaudi, is currently for the exclusive use of the residents of the area. "All my childhood, I played in this park but I never came with my daughter because it was impossible to do anything, there were too many people," says Laia Torra. Today, the 39-year-old sports teacher is visiting the park with a friend and her children.

At their disposal lies one of the most coveted places in the park — a long undulating bench decorated with colorful mosaics, overlooking a wonderful panorama of the city, with the Mediterranean on the horizon. The two women normally never go there as it is always swarmed by visitors looking for the best angles for the seemingly obligatory Barcelona selfie. "It's wonderful, it's like going back 20 years," says Torra as the kids

gallivant on a scooter and bike. "We know it's temporary but we have to take advantage of it."

The "Tourist, go home" signs which had flourished in recent years have lost their raison d'être, at least for a while. After protests in recent summers against the partying and incivility of some tourists, the former fishermen's quarter of Barceloneta has been transformed into a gigantic open-air gymnasium, where locals come to run, swim and surf during the authorized hours. "Normally I don't go to these beaches," admits a beaming Emma Prades, a 43-year-old psychologist. "Now it's more tempting. And the water is cleaner."

The 42,000 inhabitants of the Croatian city of Dubrovnik, the "pearl of the Adriatic" where some of the television series "Game of Thrones" was filmed, are also rediscovering beaches which had become overrun by tourists. The gigantic cruise ships, with their thousands of passengers, no longer anchor in the small harbor. It is a two-edged sword, bringing peace and calm as well as anxiety over the future of the economy.

"We have been able to relax a bit during those two, almost three months," says Mladen Kriz, a 43-year-old telecom technician. "This summer, we will be able to swim quietly in town." "At the same time, without tourists it is a bit empty," admits Kriz, a father of two whose wife is a tour guide. "A lot of people live on that here. How will we live without tourists?"

In Lisbon, amid the steep alleyways of the popular



BARCELONA: People exercise at Barceloneta beach on May 20, 2020 during the hours allowed by the government to exercise amid the national lockdown to prevent the spread of COVID-19. — AFP

Alfama district, Paulo da Silva shares this concern. "It's really sad, there is nothing good in all this," says the 45-year-old. "Foreigners revived this neighborhood and now everything could halt again at any moment."

In the center of the Portuguese capital, Fabiana Pavel,

an Italian architect who campaigns against mass tourism, is enjoying the peace of Bairro Alto, known for its nightlife and its fado concerts. "We will miss this era," she says. "I am not against tourism but I am against its excesses. This crisis is proof that it is dangerous to rely completely on one single industry." — AFP

Dubai prison: Virtual visits...

Continued from Page 1

the coronavirus, but said there were no "active" cases and the overall number recorded could be "counted with fingers".

Those diagnosed with COVID-19 had mild cases, he said, and required only "isolation and simple treatment". Everyone, whether serving time or employed at the jail, was tested "without exception" in coordination with the official health authorities, Shamali added. Inmates and staff must wear masks and gloves at all times, some classes and workshops were suspended and the prison gym closed.

So far, the United Arab Emirates — made of up seven emirates, including Dubai — has recorded more than 26,000 COVID-19 cases, including 233 deaths. "We seek to reduce contact at work, but our main concern is that we continue to provide the same quality of service, even if it is from afar," Badr Sultan, a prison doctor, told AFP from his office, adding that most medical consultations now took place via video conferencing.

Before admission, new inmates are tested for COVID-19 and isolated for 48 hours, said Shamali, standing near a sign that read "Hala (welcome to) Happiness". In a clinic nearby, a dermatologist

asked an inmate to describe his skin condition, prescribing an ointment after seeing the infected area on screen. In another room, a psychiatrist spoke online to an inmate about the "daily pressures" of life during a pandemic.

Since the outbreak began, the authorities have released hundreds of prisoners detained for low-level crimes or because they were unable to post bail. "We received directives to release inmates... and since the outbreak, there are 30 to 35 percent fewer prisoners," Shamali said, without specifying numbers. "We want to reduce the number on a daily basis, especially release those with simple cases, not ones accused of big crimes."

The new safety measures in the prison have been difficult on inmates, some of whom are used to spending their days in workshops and recreational classes. A group of seven inmates had been working on producing the largest-ever cardboard sculpture — the goal was for Guinness World Records to certify it.

Cardboard domes and arches were scattered across a prison recreation room — parts for a scale replica of Abu Dhabi's Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque — but the virus restrictions have slowed work on the project in the past two months. "I came to the UAE in 1999, and I loved the design of the Sheikh Zayed mosque, so I studied it and sought to build the biggest cardboard model by 2021," said the inmate in charge of the project. "We have put the project aside for now. The question now is: What do I do with my time here?" — AFP

high-flow oxygen and 10 percent were on mechanical ventilation. After two weeks, the disease worsened in 18 percent of the plasma patients and 24 percent of the control patients. As of May 1, nearly 13 percent of plasma recipients had died, compared with more than 24 percent of the control patients, with 72 percent and 67 percent, respectively, being discharged alive.

People who survive an infectious disease like COVID-19 are left with blood containing antibodies, or proteins made by the body's immune system to fight off a virus. The blood component that carries the antibodies can be collected and given to newly infected patients — it is known as "convalescent plasma". Hospitals around the world have been using plasma donated by recovered COVID-19 patients, but there has been little information on how effective the treatment is.

The US Food and Drug Administration on May 1 gave emergency approval to Gilead Sciences Inc's antiviral drug remdesivir for COVID-19 based on data showing that it reduced hospitalization time by 31 percent compared to a placebo, but did not have a significant effect on survival.

Remdesivir cuts recovery times in coronavirus patients, according to the full results of a trial published Friday night, three weeks after America's top infectious diseases expert said the study showed the medication has "clear-cut" benefits. Complete results from the research, which was carried out by US government agency the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), were published by leading medical periodical the New England Journal of Medicine.

The United States authorized the emergency use of remdesivir in hospitals on May 1, followed by Japan, while Europe is considering following suit. The study found that remdesivir, injected intravenously daily for 10 days, accelerated the recovery of hospitalized COVID-19 patients compared to a placebo in clinical tests on just over a thousand patients across 10 countries.

On April 29, NIAID director Anthony Fauci, who has become the US government's trusted face on the coronavirus pandemic, said preliminary evidence indicated remdesivir had a "clear-cut, significant and positive effect in diminishing the time to recovery". The National Institutes of Health, of which the NIAID is a part, said Friday in a statement online that investigators found "remdesivir was most beneficial for hospitalized patients with severe disease who required supplemental oxygen."

But the authors of the trial wrote that the drug did not prevent all deaths. "Given high mortality despite the use of remdesivir, it is clear that treatment with an anti-viral drug alone is not likely to be sufficient," they said. About 7.1 percent of patients given remdesivir in the trial group died within 14 days — compared with 11.9 percent in the placebo group. However, the result is just below the statistical reliability threshold, meaning it could be down to chance rather than the capability of the drug. — Agencies

Pak goes wild for blockbuster...

Continued from Page 1

The five-season series tells the story of Ertugrul, the father of Osman I who founded the Ottoman Empire, which ruled parts of Europe, Western Asia and North Africa for more than 600 years. "The response has been incredible, it's really great to see how the show is resonating with Urdu speakers around the world," said Riyaad Minty, digital director of TRT, which produced the series. PTV said viewership has been unprecedented, with the drama fetching ratings five times higher than average.

Featuring heartthrob heroes, westernized heroines and picturesque scenery, dozens of Turkish soap operas have made it onto Pakistani television channels since 2012. But a dependence on imported content is a source of frustration for some Pakistani artists, producers and directors who bemoan prime-time slots being given to a foreign show.

PTV once used to produce the subcontinent's best soap operas but has suffered in the face of rising competition from private channels. "It is a good opportuni-

ty for PTV management to look at themselves, shake their conscience and wonder how they are unable to produce a prime-time drama," Aehsun Talish, a Pakistani drama producer, told AFP.

The channel has profited from advertising breaks during the broadcasts but experts warn it is on shaky ground. "It's a cheap re-run, a temporary filling. If we truly want PTV's revival we will have to bank on local talent," Samina Ahmad, a veteran television actress, told AFP.

Turkish television has become a major vehicle of soft power, with viewers in the Muslim world becoming voracious consumers of the country's soaps. Resurrection: Ertugrul is another strategic asset for Turkey, said South Asia analyst Michael Kugelmann from the Wilson Center think tank. "There's strong backing among many in Pakistan for pan-Muslim solidarity, which translates in many cases to support for strong Muslim leaders from Malaysia to Turkey and many places in between," he said.

Turkey has backed Pakistan on the international stage, particularly in the dispute with New Delhi over Kashmir, and the two nations have enjoyed strong relations. Egypt, however, fearing Turkey holds a desire to revive the Ottoman Empire and rule the Arab Muslim world, quickly issued an Islamic legal ruling against the hit show. Saudi Arabia stopped its state broadcaster from airing all Turkish soap operas in 2018. — AFP

Iran slams 'tumor' Israel, lauds arms...

Continued from Page 1

"Some Arab governments in the region, which play the role of US puppets, have provided the necessary preconditions for this, such as economic ties and the like; these efforts are completely fruitless and sterile."

The 80-year-old leader also appeared to confirm for the first time that Iran has helped to provide Palestinians with arms. "Everyone must fill the hand of the Palestinian fighter and strengthen his back. We will proudly do our best in this way. One day we realized that the only problem of the Palestinian fighter... was the lack of weapons. We planned to resolve this issue, and the result is that the balance of power in Palestine has changed: Today Gaza can stand up to the Zionist enemy's military aggression and win."

Zeyad Al-Nakhala, chief of Palestinian Islamic Jihad, which has publicly admitted getting Iranian arms and funds, praised Khamenei's comments. "We are ready for a long jihad and victory is granted," he said in remarks distributed by the group. Every year since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran has marked Quds Day on the last Friday of Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting, in solidarity with the Palestinians. Khamenei was speaking at the event for the first time in more than 30 years as supreme leader, although he has repeatedly referred to the Palestinian cause as "the main problem of the Muslim world".

Iran has cancelled its Quds Day rallies this year to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus, which first

emerged in the country in February. This year's commemoration comes after the assassination in January of Qasem Soleimani, the powerful commander of the Quds Force, the foreign operations arm of Iran's Revolutionary Guards.

Netanyahu on Wednesday blasted Khamenei on Twitter after the Iranian leader's own account posted quotes from a speech he made in November. In the tweet on Khamenei's account, the Iranian leader was quoted as saying that "eliminating the Zionist regime doesn't mean eliminating Jews". Netanyahu responded by saying: "He should know that any regime that threatens Israel with extermination will find itself in similar danger".

The Iranian leader's tweets were also condemned by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and the European Union. The next day Israelis woke to a series of cyber attacks targeting websites of businesses, municipalities and non-governmental organizations with a message in Hebrew and English: "The countdown to the destruction of Israel began long ago".

Earlier in the week, The Washington Post reported Israel had launched a cyber attack against the Iranian port of Shahid Rajaei, located on the Strait of Hormuz, a vital route for international oil traffic. This attack was thought to be in retaliation for a cyber attack against civil hydraulic installations in Israel.

In his speech, Khamenei also criticized the UN for failing to do its job in Middle East trouble spots. "The main policy of arrogance and Zionism is to downplay the Palestinian issue in the minds of Muslim communities and to drive it into oblivion," he said. Khamenei said the Syrian conflict, the Saudi-led war on Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels and the destruction of Iraq "are all tricks to entertain the resistance front and give the Zionist regime the chance". — Agencies

"heard a big bang and woke up to people calling for the fire brigade". An AFP reporter saw charred bodies being loaded into ambulances.

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan said he was "shocked and saddened" by the crash, tweeting that he was in touch with the state-owned airline's chief executive. "Prayers & condolences go to families of the deceased," he wrote on Twitter. The Pakistan military said security forces were deployed to the area and helicopters were used to survey the damage.

Pakistan has a chequered military and civilian aviation safety record, with frequent plane and helicopter crashes over the years. In 2016, a PIA plane burst into flames after one of its two turboprop engines failed while flying from the remote north to Islamabad, killing more than 40 people.

The deadliest air disaster on Pakistani soil was in 2010 when an Airbus A321 operated by private airline Airblue and flying from Karachi crashed into the hills outside Islamabad as it came in to land, killing all 152 people on board. An official report blamed the accident on a confused captain and a hostile cockpit atmosphere.

PIA, a leading airline until the 1970s, has seen its reputation sink due to frequent cancellations, delays and financial troubles. It has been involved in numerous controversies over the years, including the jailing of a drunk pilot in Britain in 2013. — AFP

Survivor recalls horror of crash...

Continued from Page 1

Aviation Minister Ghulam Sarwar Khan said the captain, Sajjad Gull, had been described by the airline as a senior A320 pilot with extensive flight experience. The plane had first entered service in 2004 and was acquired by PIA a decade later and had logged around 47,100 flight hours, Airbus said in a statement.

Residents were the first to sift through the charred and twisted wreckage strewn in search of survivors, with witnesses reporting the cries of a man hanging from the plane's emergency exit door. Sarfraz Ahmed, a firefighter at the crash site, told AFP that rescuers had pulled bodies from the aircraft still wearing seatbelts. Residents near the scene recounted how the walls of their homes shook before a big explosion erupted as the aircraft slammed into the neighborhood.

"I was coming from the mosque when I saw the plane tilting on one side. It was so low that the walls of my house were trembling," said 14-year-old Hassan. Another resident, Mudassar Ali, said he

Stars

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

medium

Friday's Solution								
4	3	5	9	8	1	6	7	2
1	7	2	3	5	6	4	8	9
6	8	9	7	2	4	3	1	5
8	4	3	2	6	5	7	9	1
7	2	1	4	9	3	8	5	6
5	9	6	1	7	8	2	4	3
2	5	8	6	4	9	1	3	7
9	1	7	8	3	2	5	6	4
3	6	4	5	1	7	9	2	8

hard

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

You're filled with vitality today, Aries, which means you're going to feel great about yourself! You're less afraid of introducing yourself to people and making requests. With fewer doubts about everything, including yourself, you're comfortable working smarter instead of harder. Try to notice what, specifically, is making you feel so good. That way, you can recreate the feeling tomorrow.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

This would be a good day for sorting out your business, Libra. File important papers and get rid of extraneous materials cluttering up your home workspace. Making time for this now will save you even more time in the long run. As for your love life, be expressive. Clear up any old misunderstandings that could interfere with your pleasure! Even if social distance is a necessary evil. Above all, enjoy yourself!



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

You may have gotten a financial boost lately in the form of some sort of raise or reward, Taurus. The day ahead will make you realize that more discipline and work is necessary if you want to continue prospering. While there's no need for anxiety, it's a good time for putting together a strategy for the future and not just any old strategy. Think airtight, waterproof, and fail-safe!



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Doctors are crazy busy during this horrible pandemic, Scorpio, but you don't have to be sick for a non-urgent conversation with your health care provider. If you have questions about staying well or need reassurance about your physical being, that's why he or she is there! Some self-care practices are just common sense, anyway. Get some rest, eat a good breakfast, take a brisk walk, and face the day renewed.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

You're almost certainly in a phase of psychological transformation, Gemini, and you've recently seen major changes in your circle of friends and associates. Today provides an opportunity to assess just where you are and how far you've come. For instance, you could be introduced to a new team that compels you to display your many talents. For an extrovert like you, this is right up your alley.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

This should be a peaceful day for you, Sagittarius. Be sure to make the most of it, because it's the calm before the storm. Look forward to discussions and exchanges with colleagues or close friends. Today would be ideal for tightening some of your professional ties. Certain people might suddenly seem more reasonable than you imagined them to be, so listen up!



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

You might feel a little worn out right now, Cancer, as if you haven't been getting enough vitamins or rest. This isn't the best time to let your health falter! Maybe you feel like you're losing track of issues that are important to you, such as your children's interrupted education. Slow down a bit whether you or not want to. Today, give top priority to all the commonplace details of your daily life.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

"Evidence" is your word of the day, Capricorn. Everyone knows that you have a facility for spending your time thinking and analyzing. Today, on the other hand, you'll actually be seeing things with great clarity. You won't need to study, ponder, and review from every angle. It's a little like you've just invented a new theory that repeatedly gets confirmed by others throughout the day. What a powerful feeling!



Leo (July 23-August 22)

If you're in love, Leo, you'll love today. You could plan for almost anything from a little post-lockdown trip together (hopefully that day comes soon!) to a lifetime full of children and grandchildren. Even though your foresight sometimes eclipses your spontaneity, let yourself yield to the unexpected a little bit. The future will be a bright contrast after the comparative gloom of the past few weeks.



Aquarius (January 20-February 18)

You will sail through this day on the gentlest of breezes, Aquarius. Even though you've been sheltering in place way too long, it's like you've just come back from a week in the country. You're calm, refreshed, and relaxed, and no amount of job-related trouble can shake the feeling. You see things in a more positive light. Problems that once seemed insurmountable now resolve themselves almost without your help. Lucky you!



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

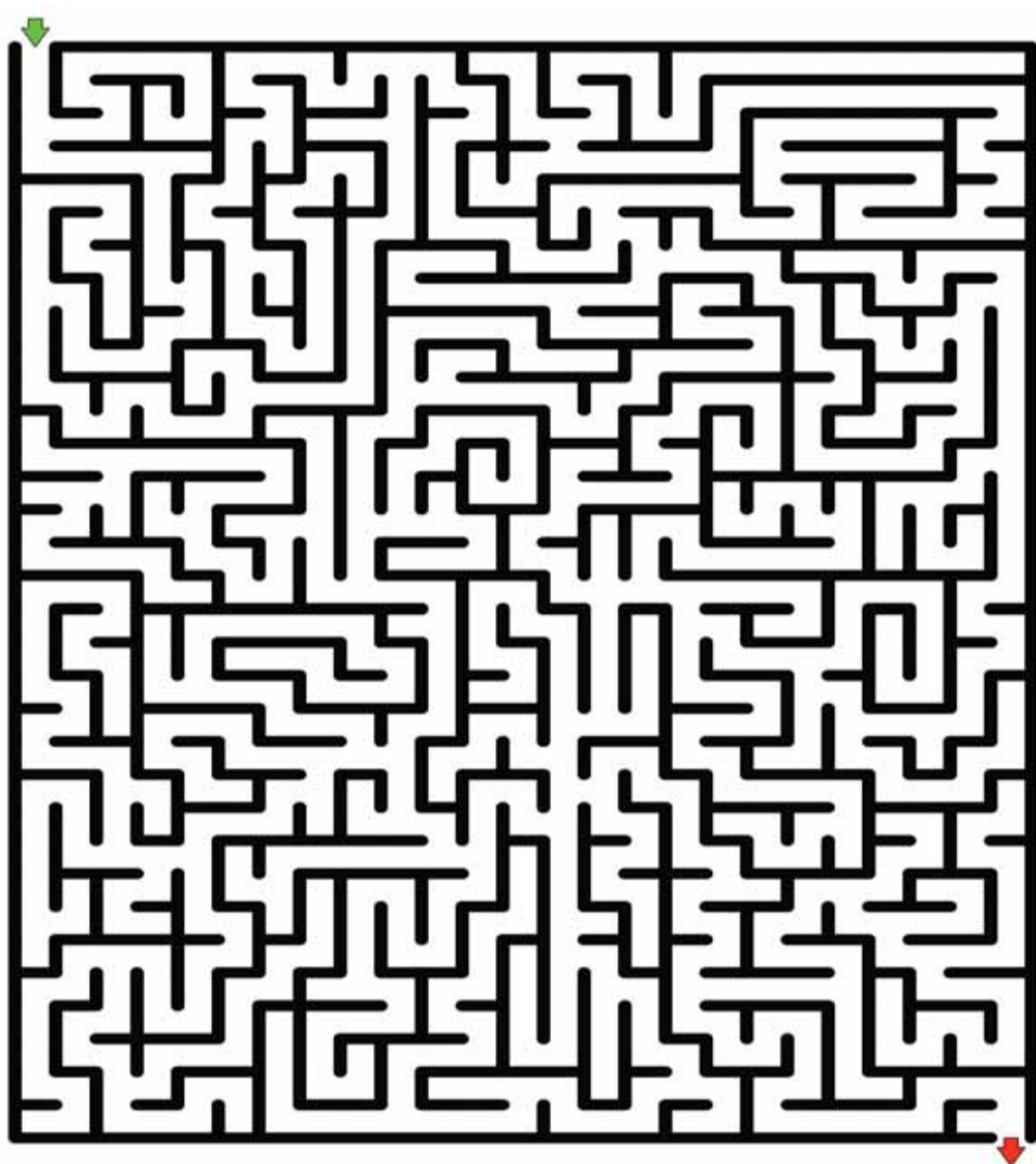
Virgo, you may feel a little tired and depressed over breakfast this morning. Domestic responsibilities sometimes overload your spirit. How about treating yourself to a short staycation? A little free time just for you? It's vital for your morale! Take a safe walk and breathe fresh air through your facemask. Use the time off to draw up a weekly schedule that will make your workload seem less daunting.



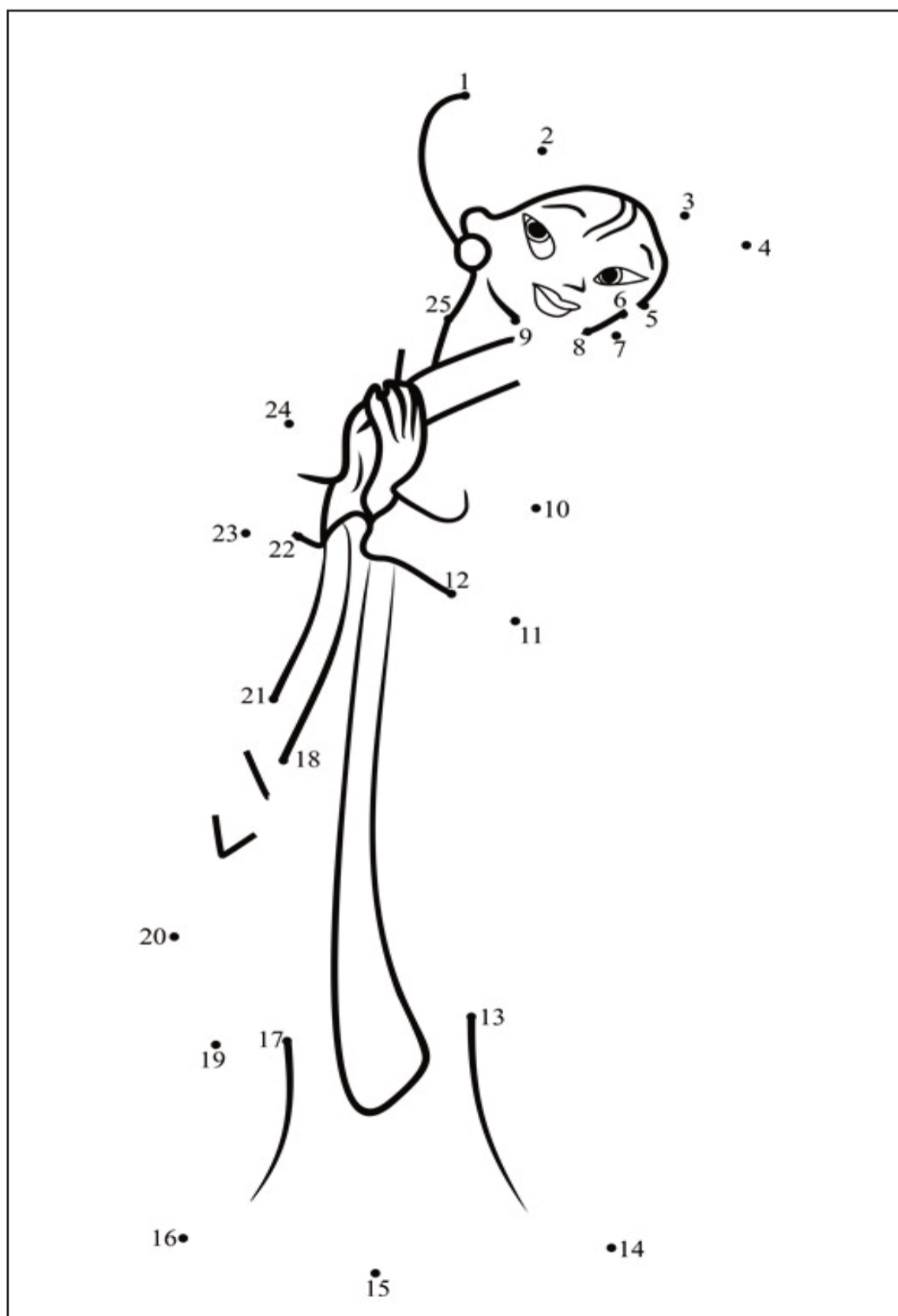
Pisces (February 19-March 20)

If you're looking for a new job, Pisces, perhaps this is the day you find it. "Lucky" is the word that sums up today! Without encouraging you to play the lottery, you can be pretty sure that you'll feel a surge of confidence. You'll be able to resolve big or small problems with practicality and ease. That's lucky enough, isn't it? In such uncertain times, it's great to win big for a change.

Find the way

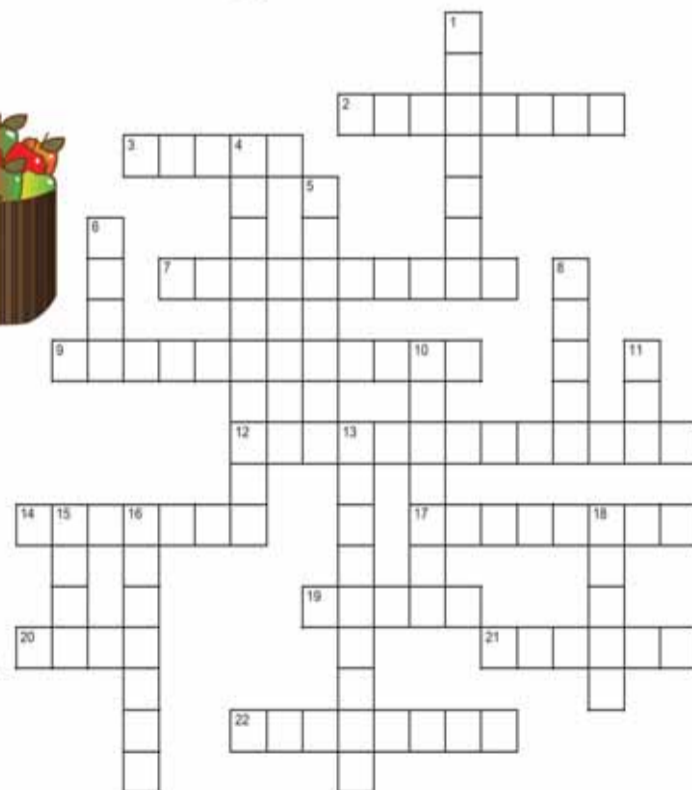


Join the dots



Crossword

Johnny Appleseed Crossword



Across

- 2. Direction American pioneers headed.
- 3. Put into the ground to grow.
- 7. Along with being a gardener, Johnny Appleseed was also a ____.
- 9. Care and preservation of nature.
- 12. State where Johnny Appleseed was born.
- 14. Johnny Appleseed's real last name.
- 17. Johnny Appleseed is an ____ legend.
- 19. Johnny Appleseed supposedly threw these on the ground wherever he went.
- 20. Mr. Appleseed's first name.
- 21. A popular story regarded as historical but not necessarily true.
- 22. No shoes on his feet.

10. Place to pick apples.

11. Johnny Appleseed's hat.
13. In what month do we celebrate Johnny Appleseed Day?

15. A courageous person.

16. An early settler or explorer of an area.
18. Beverage made from apples.

Down

- 1. A person who moves into a new area.
- 4. A person who grows plants to sell them.
- 5. Johnny Appleseed cared deeply about all ____.
- 6. The "Buckeye State", where Johnny planted many nurseries.
- 8. Fruit such as a Granny Smith or a Red Delicious.

Word Bank

American	John	Plant
Animals	Legend	Pot
Apple	Massachusetts	Seeds
Barefoot	Missionary	September
Chapman	Nurseryman	Settler
Cider	Ohio	Westward
Conservation	Orchard	
Hero	Pioneer	

Sports

Photo of the day



TEAHUPOO: Arthur Arutkin windsurfs in Teahupoo, Tahiti, French Polynesia. —Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

Door still open for Sunwolves: Rugby Australia

SYDNEY: The door was not quite closed on Japan's Sunwolves joining an Australian domestic competition involving Super Rugby teams, while negotiations for a new broadcast agreement had been "fruitful", Rugby Australia (RA) said yesterday.

Super Rugby was postponed after seven weeks in mid-March as governments imposed travel bans due to the novel coronavirus, and Australia have announced plans for a domestic competition starting in July that could include the Sunwolves.

"We are still in discussion with the Sunwolves and the Australian government on that," RA interim chief executive Rob Clarke told reporters on a conference call when asked if the Japan based side had been ruled out of the competition.

"It's not a quick process," Sunwolves, who have already said they are eager to participate in the competition, said in a statement yesterday that negotiations between RA and the Australian government are currently going on about the team being allowed to take part. The competition is something of a stop-gap measure to help RA through a financial crisis that has been exacerbated by the shutdown caused by the pandemic. The organisation is also yet to secure a new broadcasting agreement from next year, but Clarke said that was his top priority and he had been in active discussions about a new contract with current broadcaster Fox Sports.

"Those discussions will continue next week," he said. "I'm confident we will get some clarity fairly soon (especially) given we are trying to kick off a domestic Super Rugby competition."

"Time is of the essence and those conversations are well advanced," Clarke added that RA was "open minded" about talks that southern hemisphere rugby body SANZAAR and the Six Nations organisers have entered into about potential realignment of the global calendar. "We should be open minded to any solution that potentially brings in better commercial outcomes as long as it doesn't compromise the high performance outcomes of the Wallabies," he said. —Reuters

NASCAR back on track as F1 and IndyCar stuck in virtual world

Coca Cola 600 set for this weekend at Charlotte Motor Speedway

NEW YORK: NASCAR will have a clear run this Sunday on what would normally be motor racing's most glamorous and busiest day, with Formula One and IndyCar remain stuck in the virtual world.

While the Formula One and IndyCar seasons remain stalled by the novel coronavirus outbreak, NASCAR returned to live racing last Sunday and has its foot on the gas.

The popular North American stockcar series has staged two Cup races and an Xfinity series race over a five-day stretch and is looking ahead to one of its biggest events — the Coca Cola 600 set for this weekend at Charlotte Motor Speedway.

The US Memorial Day holiday weekend usually provides a glorious high-octane feast for motor racing fans, with Formula One, IndyCar and NASCAR staging signature events on the Sunday. It begins with the Monaco Grand Prix, which is followed by the Indianapolis 500 and concludes with the Coca Cola 600, NASCAR's longest race of the season. But this Sunday NASCAR has the spotlight to itself, running the 600 mile race in prime time with no competition other than a virtual Monaco Grand Prix and an esport race on the Indianapolis Motor Speedway's famed 2.5 mile oval featuring seven former 500 winners, including 80-year-old Mario Andretti.

In fact, NASCAR will just about be the only show

in town, with the NBA and NHL, which would in the thick of the playoffs at this point of the season, and MLB all on the sidelines muddling through various return to play scenarios.

INCREDIBLE OPPORTUNITY

"This is an incredible opportunity for NASCAR to have an exclusive foothold on the day," Neal Pilson, former president of CBS Sports and now head of Pilson Communications Inc., told Reuters.

"On a day that usually has baseball, the NBA post-season and NHL Stanley Cup playoffs and golf they have the weekend pretty much to themselves." Aside from forlorn scenes of races run against the backdrop of sprawling empty grandstands, NASCAR's return has been well received by sports-starved fans, who for nearly two months had survived on virtual action and reruns of historic contests.

The return race last Sunday at Darlington Raceway pulled in 6.5 million viewers, making it the most watched non-Daytona 500 NASCAR Cup race since Atlanta on March 5 2017.

After years of declining ratings and the retirement of many of the stockcar's biggest names, NASCAR has been handed a huge opportunity to reacquire the series to the casual fan and turn around television ratings that for years had been in decline.

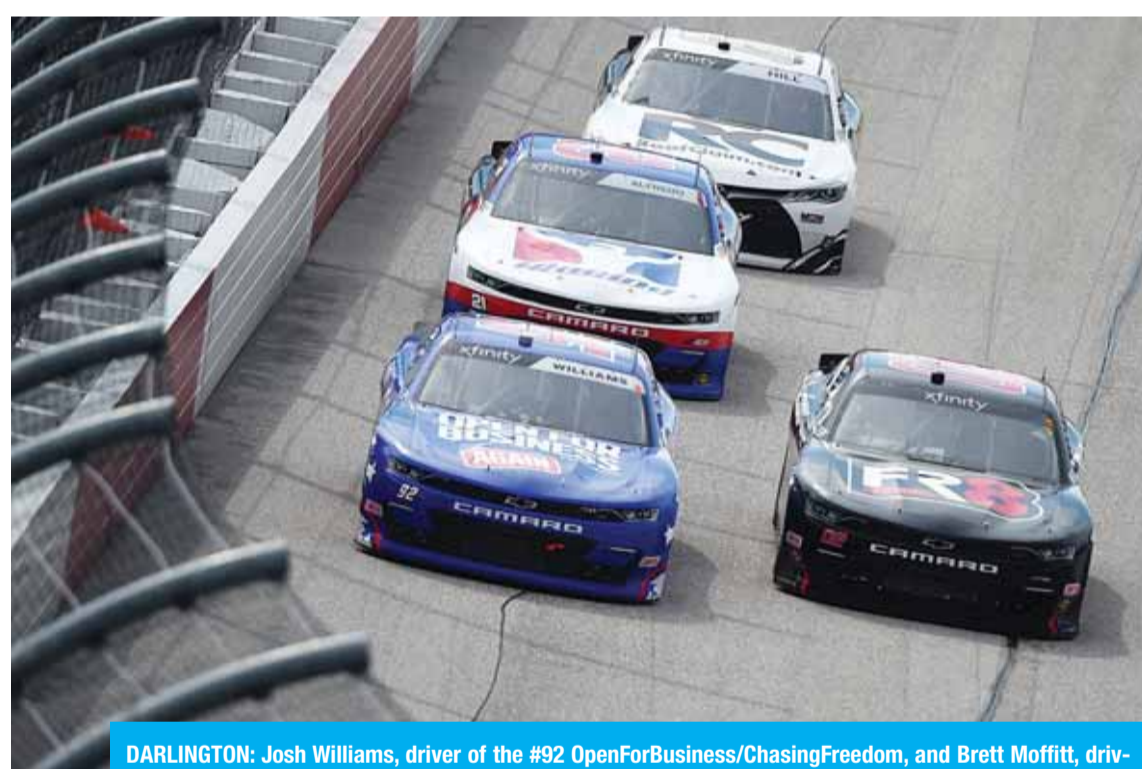


Only show in town

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DARLINGTON: Josh Williams, driver of the #92 OpenForBusiness/ChasingFreedom, and Brett Moffitt, driver of the #02 FR8Auctions Chevrolet, race during the NASCAR Xfinity Series Toyota 200 at Darlington Raceway on May 21, 2020 in Darlington, South Carolina. —AFP

"The ratings were quite good and I expect they will be again this weekend," said Pilson. "NASCAR ratings last year were up from prior years, they turned a corner and had an improved television per-

formance over past years.

"There was a long period of time where they could not match previous numbers. Now it's all positive." —Reuters

WTA pros take the court in Florida mini-tournament

MIAMI: Americans Alison Riske and Danielle Collins and Aussie Ajla Tomljanovic were among the winners Friday on the opening day of a women's tennis mini-tournament in Florida that offered pros a chance to play amid the coronavirus pandemic.

The WTA women's tennis tour cancelled four more events this week and won't resume until at least July 20.

But four women ranked in the top 60 in the world turned out for the UTR Pro Match Series event in Palm Beach, which followed a similar event for men two weeks ago.

World number 51 Collins topped 28th-ranked compatriot Amanda Anisimova in the opening match 4-1, 4-2 and said she was "grateful" to be back on court even with no fans in attendance.

"I'm familiar with playing without fans but I definitely miss it," she said. "One of the things that makes it so special to be a professional athlete is having people supporting you."

Tomljanovic, ranked 56th, defeated 19th-ranked Riske 4-3, 4-1 and in the final round-robin match of the day Riske beat Anisimova 0-4, 4-0, 4-3. The tournament concludes Saturday

with more round-robin matches, a third-place and a championship match.

All are played in a shortened format in which the first player to four games with a two-game lead pockets a set. "Just getting into the competitive spirit again was kind of got me really excited today," said Tomljanovic.

She said her first few weeks off had been a welcome break, but when she felt the need to return to training it was difficult to find motivation with no tournaments scheduled. "I need that competition to keep me going," she said.

Health protocols are in place to protect players from the threat of coronavirus. Players had their temperatures taken upon arrival at the venue and carried their own equipment and towels onto the court.

With social distancing in place, a racquet tap had to suffice for a handshake, and the umpire wore a mask. Each player had her own set of marked balls and collected them herself, with no ballkids in attendance.

While some areas of the United States remain under strict lockdowns, Florida has begun to open up and state officials have specifically welcomed the return of sports without spectators.

The Ultimate Fighting Championship mixed martial arts outfit returned to competition in Florida in May and Tiger Woods will tee it up on Sunday with Phil Mickelson and NFL stars Tom Brady and Peyton Manning in a made-for-tv charity golf event in Hobe Sound, Florida. —AFP

Polish sprinter Irena named as the greatest female athlete of all time

LONDON: To those with only a passing knowledge of athletics it might have come as something of a surprise last month when America's Track and Field News magazine named Polish sprinter Irena Szewinska as the greatest female athlete of all time.

However, in her homeland, and to those who followed the sport in the 1960s and 70s, it was an entirely natural recognition of a woman whose range and longevity made her stand out in a crowded field and who went on to become a respected administrator before dying from cancer in 2018 at the age of 72.

She is Poland's most decorated Olympian and her list of achievements is nothing short of astonishing, starting at the 1964 Olympics when she won silver medals in the 200 metres and long jump and a glorious gold in the sprint relay. She also scooped

up 10 world records over 16 years at the top.

Szewinska took gold in the 200m four years later, as well as bronze in the 100m - though the Games ended on a personal low as she dropped the baton the 4x100m relay.

Giving birth to the first of two sons and an ankle injury stopped her from training for a year, but she recovered for the Munich Olympics in 1972, where she won bronze from the European championships to her name.

Four years later in Montreal she decided to skip 100m and 200m and focus on the 400m, having become the first woman to break 50seconds in 1974. In the final Szewinska won by a street in a world record 49.28 seconds - a time that would have been good enough for gold in almost every Olympics since.

"The combination of winning the Olympic gold medal and

breaking the world record is exactly what everyone dreams about and what I managed to achieve," she told a Polish TV documentary decades later.

Her fifth Games was something of an anti-climax as Szewinska suffered a muscle strain during the semi-final of the 400m in Moscow. She retired soon after with seven Olympic medals and a mountain of gold, silver and bronze from the European championships to her name.

She was later active in several sports organizations, including the Polish Olympic Committee and International Olympic Committee, to which she was appointed in 1998.

"Sport was a great adventure of my life, when I was an athlete and my fate was that I am still connected with sport. I am passionate about it, this is my hobby," she said. —Reuters

Sports

Bash's buzzer-beater lifts Kings to NBA 2K sweep

NBA great Ewing hospitalized with COVID-19

LOS ANGELES: Rookie Matthew "Bash" Robles sank a buzzer-beating 3-pointer to seal Kings Guard Gaming's two-game sweep of Grizz Gaming in NBA 2K League action on Friday.

After winning the opener 82-68, the Kings trailed 53-40 heading to the fourth quarter of the second game, but they rallied to trail by one point with 1.1 seconds remaining. Yusuf "Yusuf_Scarbz" Abdulla fired the inbounds pass to Bash at the top of the key, and Bash hit the decisive shot to give the Kings a 60-58 win.

In other matches as Week 3 concluded, Knicks Gaming spoiled Celtics Crossover Gaming's season debut, posting a 2-1 series win, and Wizards District Gaming dumped Hornets Venom GT 2-0.

The scheduled match between Heat Check Gaming and Jazz Gaming was postponed due to technical difficulties. No makeup date was announced. Originally due to begin its season March 24, the NBA 2K League postponed play because of 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 Kings won their opener against the Grizz behind 20 points apiece from Bash and Waseem "Seemo" Talbert plus 15 points, 14 rebounds and eight assists from Connor "Dat Boy Sholtz" Rodrigues. Zach "Vandi" Vandivier paced the Grizz with 23 points and eight assists, and Dayvon "GOOFY757" Curry had 12 points and 12 boards.

Seemo produced a team-high 16 points as the

Kings closed the series with in dramatic fashion. Bash scored 15 points, and Dat Boy Sholtz grabbed 18 rebounds. Vandi put up 27 points, and GOOFY757 contributed 19 points and 18 rebounds.

The Knicks held off the Celtics 60-56 in the decisive third game, which was delayed late in the first quarter due to a technical issue. Christopher "Duck" Charles scored 31 points for the Knicks while Albano "oFAB" Thomallari registered 16 points and 10 assists for the Celtics.

Duck's 39 points powered the Knicks to a 69-43 victory over the Celtics in the series opener. oFAB scored 24 points in the defeat. The Celtics leveled the series with a 58-57 win, getting 29 points from oFAB and 15 from Tamer "Bulley" Mustafa. Malik "OriginalMalik" Hobson had 16 points and seven assists for the Knicks, who also got 10 points and 13 rebounds from Robert "CantGuardRob" Nastasi.

John "JBM" Mascone's 27 points and 14 assists guided the Wizards to a 75-69 win over the Hornets in their series opener. The Wizards' Ryan "Dayfri" Conger added 19 points and 14 rebounds. Justin "Snubby" Stemerman led the Hornets with 27 points, and teammate Alexander "Expose" Whelan had 23 points. The Wizards pulled out a 59-56 victory to complete the sweep, getting 19 points from JBM. Expose scored 18 points, and Xavier "Type" Vescovi had 12 points and 14 rebounds for the Hornets.

Meanwhile, NBA Hall of Famer Patrick Ewing, now the head basketball coach at Georgetown University, is in hospital with COVID-19. Ewing, 57, said on Twitter on Friday he had tested positive for the virus. "This virus is serious and should not be taken lightly," the New York Knicks icon said in a

lockdown restrictions.

England players returned to individual skill-based training this week with the country hoping to begin their delayed summer of cricket with a test series against West Indies in July.

Pakistan are scheduled to tour England to play three tests in August followed by an equal number of Twenty20 Internationals, with the matches taking place behind closed doors as part of measures to combat COVID-19.

"Bowlers are at a particularly high risk of injury on return to play after a period of enforced time-out," the world governing body ICC said in its back-to-cricket guidelines released late on Friday.

The ICC advised teams to use larger squads and exercise caution over bowlers' workloads, saying test cricket would require a minimum of eight to 12



ORLANDO: File photo shows Darius Garland #10 of the Cleveland Cavaliers shoots the ball against the Orlando Magic on October 23, 2019 at Amway Center in Orlando, Florida. —AFP

statement. "I want to encourage everyone to stay safe and take care of yourselves and your loved ones."

"Now more than ever, I want to thank healthcare workers and everyone on the front lines. I'll be fine and we will all get through this," Georgetown's athletics department said in a statement that Ewing was "under care and isolated at a local hospital."

"He is the only member of the men's basketball program to have tested positive for the virus," the statement said. Ewing, who was a member of the 1992 Olympic gold medal-winning "Dream Team,"

and also won Olympic gold in 1984, played 17 seasons in the NBA, mostly for the Knicks, earning 11 All-Star selections.

The Knicks sent Ewing good wishes via Twitter saying "Get well soon, Big Fella. Stay strong". He was the first overall selection in the NBA draft after leading Georgetown to a national championship in 1985 and was Rookie of the Year in 1986.

After retiring from the NBA he turned to coaching and spent many seasons as an NBA assistant coach before taking over the head coaching job at his alma mater Georgetown. —Agencies

Bowlers require two months' preparation to play Tests: ICC

MUMBAI: Bowlers looking at resuming test cricket after the novel coronavirus lockdown will require two to three months of preparation to avoid injuring themselves, the International Cricket Council (ICC) has said.

Cricket, like other global sports, has been suspended since March due to the COVID-19 pandemic but some countries are plotting guidelines for the return of the game as governments start easing

Pochettino 'happy' that Mourinho replaced him

LONDON: Mauricio Pochettino insisted Friday that he was "happy" that Jose Mourinho replaced him as Tottenham coach. Mourinho took over in November despite Pochettino having enjoyed a successful five-and-a-half year spell in charge of the London side.

"I am so happy that he is at Tottenham, replacing me," admitted Pochettino who is now officially off the payroll at Spurs after his six-month gardening leave ended.

That leaves him free to take other jobs without the worry of prospective employers having to pay compensation. "And of course I am happy as well to leave the club in the way that we left it, with all the facilities that are the best in the world."

"For sure, he is very grateful for the way that we helped to build the club, which is now his club." Pochettino recalled how he and Mourinho had forged a close relationship during their days as rivals in Spain's La Liga.

"With Jose, we know each other for a long time," he explained. "When I was the coach of Espanyol, and he was at Real Madrid, we had a very good relationship. He's a top coach. And in life, look what happens. I always think I'd replace him."

"He was at Real Madrid. I say, 'Oh, maybe one day I can take your place at Real Madrid', and look at how life works out! He has taken my place at Tottenham. Unbelievable, eh?" —AFP



Mauricio Pochettino

Premier League chief 'confident' of June restart

LONDON: Premier League chief executive Richard Masters is confident the top-flight season will resume in June as 'Project Restart' gathers pace. Clubs returned to socially distanced training in small groups this week and the league hope to begin playing the remaining 92 matches on June 12 or 19.

Premier League players and staff have been checked for the coronavirus, with six people testing positive

including Watford defender Adrian Mariappa.

"We've taken the first step. It's great for everybody, including the fans, to see our players back on the training ground," Masters told BBC Sport on Friday.

Masters said he was "as confident as we can be" that teams would be able to start in June. Asked if the Premier League had an exact date for a return, Masters said the organisation had to be "flexible".

While the top tier is taking baby steps towards emulating the Bundesliga's return to action, leagues in France, Scotland and the Netherlands have been abandoned because of the pandemic.

Masters said he recognised the

need for "contingency plans" and admitted "curtailment is still a possibility". Watford captain Troy Deeney and Chelsea midfielder N'Golo Kante have both opted against returning to training over health fears.

Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden said phase two, the return of contact training in elite sports, could get government approval "later this week".

But Masters admitted the Premier League will not approve that step until it is safe. "We wouldn't have taken the first step to get back to training if we weren't convinced we had created a very safe environment for our players," he said.

"It is the first step and we have to be sure when we go to contact training we have completed those

processes. "We have done everything we possibly can to make return to training as safe as possible."

"We think it is safe to return. We have to respect players' decisions not to return to training. I would be comfortable to return to training." Matches will be played behind closed doors due to the virus, but Masters said the Premier League want games to be staged at clubs' normal stadiums rather than neutral venues, which was the original suggestion.

"We're talking to the authorities about that," he said. "I do believe we can appeal to fans not to congregate outside football grounds or go to other people's houses to watch football matches in contravention of government guidelines." —AFP

Euro 2020 kicks off without footballers, but on console

PARIS: Euro 2020 may have been swept from the calendar due to coronavirus, but UEFA's video-game eTournament version kicks off today regardless. Instead of Kylian Mbappe, Harry Kane or Cristiano Ronaldo racing around the pitch, gamers will slug it out, contesting the first ever eEuro from their armchairs. "The weight of the whole thing is on our shoulders," said 21-year-old Frenchman Lotfi Derradji, who comes from the Paris suburbs but 'plays' for Monaco where he was crowned French champion in 2018.

"We will represent France not on the pitch but on the console, we're getting huge amounts of support," said Derradji's international and club teammate, Walid Rachid Tebane, who won the individual European title in June 2019. "We are disappointed that the Euros have been postponed but at the same time it switches more attention on to us," added Derradji, who has been playing with international French striker - and gaming enthusiast - Antoine Griezmann.

These two bespectacled eSports professionals earn 2,000-6,000 euros a month, but can boost that with the 40,000 euros up for grabs this weekend and its commercial tie-ins.

ELECTRONIC VERSION

Using a Playstation console, the group matches are a single two-versus-two contest. Matches in the knockout stages will be best of three contests and a mixture of one-versus-one and two-versus-two. The final will be best of five.

"A Kylian Mbappe will always be more fluid to play with than a Mitroglou but in the game he isn't better than him," explains Derradji, referring to Kostas Mitroglou a Greek striker who is on Marseille's books.

"It will never replace real football though, let's not get carried away. It's not always easy to convince people about an event where the competitors are sat down." But the popularity of on-line games such as Fortnite and League of Legends with a young audience is seen by UEFA as a sign that the landscape is changing.

UEFA marketing director Guy-Laurent Epstein says the lockdown has been a boon for eSports. "The (games and emergence of gamers) represent an opportunity to be seized," he says. "We have seen an explosion of events over the past few months because it represents an alternative for sports fans," he told AFP.

"And some of them have attracted significant audiences." He added: "We hope for a minimum of four million viewers over the weekend." "We have seen that fans deprived of sports are tuning in to watch esports competitions even if they had never done that before." —AFP

18 NASCAR back on track as F1 and IndyCar stuck in virtual world



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19 Pochettino 'happy' that Mourinho replaced him



Hertha hammer Union in empty stadium

A minute silence held before kick-off for all victims of COVID-19



BERLIN: Hertha Berlin's Belgian defender Dedryck Boyata (C) scores the 4-0 during the German first division Bundesliga football match between Hertha Berlin and FC Union Berlin at the Olympic stadium in Berlin, Germany. — AFP

BERLIN: Hosts Hertha claimed the Berlin derby bragging rights over Union on Friday with a convincing 4-0 victory in their almost empty 74,000-capacity Olympic Stadium.

Hertha moved up to 10th place after the opening match of the second round of games since the Bundesliga restarted last week under strict coronavirus measures thanks to second-half goals from Vedad Ibisevic, Dodi Lukebakio, Matheus Cunha and Dedryck Boyata.

"It would have been fantastic if we could have played a game like that in front of 75,000 spectators. But I hope that the fans at least had fun in front of their TVs," said Hertha coach Bruno Labbadia.

"In the first half we played very well against well-organised opponents. I had to make that clear to my team at half-time because they were feeling a bit negative.

"By the end we were happy because these were important points in the relegation battle." Labbadia

started Czech Republic midfielder Vladimir Darida in the only change from last Saturday's win at Hoffenheim in his first home match in charge.

Union's Urs Fischer, who guided the east Berlin outfit to the top-flight for the first time this season, brought in four fresh faces to his starting lineup after Sunday's loss to champions Bayern Munich.

A minute silence was held before kick-off at the eerily quiet ground in the German capital in remembrance of all victims of COVID-19. The best chance of the opening 20 minutes, which were dominated by Labbadia's men, fell to winger Lukebakio but the DR Congo international's effort was saved by Rafal Gikiewicz. Labbadia's side continued their dominance into the second half.



Kissing his elbows

Lukebakio was stopped two minutes into second half again by Gikiewicz before captain Ibisevic headed home a powerful opener.

Just 70 seconds later Hertha doubled their lead as Bosnia-Herzegovina forward Ibisevic fed Lukebakio who got the better of Gikiewicz with a side-footed effort.

Both goals were greeted by the Hertha club anthem echoing around the ground built for the 1936 Olympics as it was played on the public address system. Labbadia celebrated by elbow bumping with his coaching staff as did his players on the field.

Hertha added a third on the hour mark as Brazilian playmaker Matheus Cunha scored his fourth goal of the season. Lukebakio missed with an ambitious overhead kick inside the box and Cunha, who joined

from RB Leipzig in January, side-footed home from outside the area after 62 minutes.

Centre-back Boyata, who apologised for breaching virus-related league protocol after grabbing the face of team-mate Marko Grujic during last weekend's win, claimed a fourth with 13 minutes to play.

The Belgium defender celebrated by kissing his elbows and chest-bumping team-mates including Jordan Torunarigha as they clinched revenge after November's derby defeat, the first time the sides had met in the German top-flight.

"We laid it on a plate for Hertha. But we've lost one game, nothing more, nothing less," said Union coach Fischer. On Saturday, second-placed Borussia Dortmund can close the gap to a point on leaders Bayern Munich with a win over Wolfsburg.

Bayern host Eintracht Frankfurt in 13th spot later in the day. Elsewhere, Borussia Moenchengladbach will place 13,000 cut-out images of fans in their stadium for the visit of Bayer Leverkusen. — AFP

Seeking spotlight, athletics takes a leap in the dark

PARIS: With traditional competition shut down by the coronavirus pandemic, athletics has begun experimenting with imaginative and unusual ways to ensure that, somehow, the show goes on.

The Olympics and European Championships have been postponed and there no traditional meetings are scheduled until the Diamond League in Monaco on August 14, yet there has been a steady stream of creative initiatives to allow competition.

There have been long-distance pole-vault show-downs and solo races against the clock.

Micro meetings are planned and, in a sport built on direct competition, promoters of traditional meetings are looking at ways to stage meaningful one-runner races in arenas where no hands are clapping.

"In this period when nothing is happening, there is

no bad idea, apart from taking health risks," Remy Charpentier, the organiser of the Monaco meeting, told AFP.

The postponed London Marathon launched the 2.6 Challenge in which participants attempted solo events based on that number. Some sat in cornflakes, Mo Farah swung from a climbing frame but others ran or rolled.

Three of the world's leading pole vaulters managed to compete while staying at home with the Ultimate Garden Challenge on May 3 as Swede Armand 'Mondo' Duplantis, the world record holder, took on Frenchman Renaud Lavillenie, and two-time US world champion Sam Kendricks.

Watched, World Athletics estimated, by more than a million people worldwide, Duplantis, jumping in his back garden in his native Louisiana and Lavillenie, in Clermont-Ferrand, both cleared a bar set at 5 metres 36 times in 30 minutes while Kendricks, in Mississippi, managed 26.

"It's already huge even to be able to do exhibitions again," Lavillenie told AFP, adding that he was surprised to have felt "a little bit of adrenaline" with this ersatz competition.

The format was duplicated by three of the world's

top women vaulters jumping at their training grounds with Greek Olympic champion Ekaterini Stefanidi beating American Katie Nageotte and Canadian Alysha Newman.

As the lockdown eases in some parts of Europe, 'Flight Night' involving four German pole vaulters, is planned at a drive-in cinema in Dusseldorf on June 12 while six micro-meetings have been scheduled in the Czech Republic.

Those will start in Kladno on June 1 with three events — women's javelin, men's shot put and men's 300m — on the announced schedule.

'ATHLETICS OF 2030'

In addition to "private" initiatives, the big meetings are looking for a way to keep the show going, which is a problem in events where athletes compete at the same time.

The Oslo Diamond League event, on June 11, has been renamed "the Impossible Games" and will operate "in full observation of Norway's coronavirus regulations and social distancing rules."

The hour-long made-for-TV event will again feature Duplantis who will be at the Bislett stadium as will Norwegian Sondre Guttormsen while Lavillenie

will vault in his French garden.

Two Norwegians will make solo attempts at records in little-run distances.

Double 400m hurdles world champion Karsten Warholm will try to break the world 300m hurdles mark and Karoline Bjerkeli Grovdal attempt a 3,000m record with her pace set by a lights embedded in the side of the track. There is also a plan for two hurdlers to race each other over 200m.

Meanwhile, Monaco is hoping to run a normal event. "We hope to stay with a traditional meeting, we still have three months left," said Charpentier.

"You don't have to be innovative at all costs but you have to do what works for you. If 22 players can play football in the Bundesliga, then 10 runners should be able to compete together."

The former decathlete Alain Blondel, who was in charge of the cancelled Rabat meet, sees the crisis as an athletics laboratory "to build the athletics of 2030."

"These innovations aren't imitation athletics, you shouldn't see it as a classic competition, it's closer to a TV show based on an athletic performance," he told AFP. "We're wondering what idea we can come up with that gives a bit of life." — AFP