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Suspicious transactions abroad referred to prosecution: Saleh

US approves sale of 84 Patriot missiles to Kuwait

All of Maidan Hawally to be under lockdown

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Acting Director General of Public Relations and Security Media at the Ministry of Interior Brig Tawheed Al-Kandari confirmed to Kuwait Times that Salmiya is not included in the isolated areas, but that all of Maidan Hawally will be isolated. When asked whether only block 11 of Salmiya (known locally as Maidan Hawally) will be isolated or if blocks 10 and 12 of Salmiya will also be isolated, Kandari replied he could not confirm this. "On Sunday 6:00 am everything will be clear," he said.

A partial 12-hour curfew went into effect yesterday evening at 6 pm, and is expected to last until June 21. But for some areas including Hawally

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KUWAIT: Concrete barriers block the entrance to Hawally on Friday as the area was placed under lockdown yesterday to combat the spread of the coronavirus. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

KUWAIT: The financial probe department of the ministry of finance has finalized scrutinizing reports about transactions purportedly involving Kuwait-based companies with a Chinese company and a previous Malaysian government, a senior official announced on Friday. The department has also notified the public prosecutor due to suspicions of violation of law 106/2013 with respect to combating money laundering and terrorism funding, said Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh.

Saleh said in a statement that the steps were taken in line with a Cabinet resolution on May 20, 2020 tasking supervisory authorities to probe media reports about corruption-tainted transactions, related directly or indirectly to companies based in Kuwait or parties or government officials with a Chinese company and a previous Malaysian government regarding an

enterprise executed outside Kuwait. The Cabinet has been informed of the conclusion of investigations by the financial probe division and notification to the public prosecutor, the minister said. The notification, Saleh added, refers all parties linked with these dealings, as well as the companies, to the public prosecution to pursue legal proceedings.

Moreover, the Audit Bureau, simultaneously, continues examining and revising these transactions to determine whether there has been any misappropriation of public funds and infringement on interests of any Kuwaiti government department. The government measures to protect public funds emanate from its staunch advocacy of its constitutional duties, namely protection of public funds, Saleh emphasized.

The government will continue to deal seriously with media reports or what may transpire from the probes

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Trump cuts WHO ties; Merkel to snub G7 meet

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump said he is severing ties with the World Health Organization over its handling of the coronavirus pandemic, as the death toll from the disease spiked again in the United States and Brazil. Trump's move signals an end to hundreds of millions of dollars in funding to the United Nations agency just when it needs it most, with outbreaks in many parts of the world yet to reach their peak.

Countries in Latin America are bracing for difficult weeks ahead, especially Brazil, where the death toll shot up by 1,124 on Friday and there was a record number of

new infections. Trump initially suspended funding to the WHO last month, accusing it of not doing enough to curb the early spread of the virus and being too lenient with China, where the virus emerged late last year.

On Friday he made that decision permanent in a major blow for the agency's finances, as the United States is by far its biggest contributor, pumping in \$400 million last year. "Because they have failed to make the requested and greatly needed reforms, we will be today terminating our relationship with the World Health Organization," Trump told reporters.

The Republican leader said the US would be redirecting WHO funds "to other worldwide and deserving urgent global public health needs". "The world needs answers from China on the virus. We must have transparency," Trump said. Beijing has furiously denied US allegations that it played down or even covered up the threat from the virus

after it was detected in the Chinese city of Wuhan in December, insisting it has been forthcoming.

Meanwhile, German Chancellor Angela Merkel will not attend an in-person summit of G7 leaders that Trump has suggested he will host despite concerns over the coronavirus pandemic, the Politico website quoted her spokesman as saying Friday. Leaders from the Group of Seven, which the United States heads this year, had been scheduled to meet by videoconference in late June after COVID-19 scuttled plans to gather in-person at Camp David, the US presidential retreat in the state of Maryland.

Trump last week, however, indicated that he could hold the huge gathering after all, "primarily at the White House" but also potentially parts of it at Camp David. Merkel, a scientist by training, has declined. "As of today, considering the overall pandemic

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ISTANBUL: Worshippers wearing protective facemasks maintain the required social distance during Friday prayers outside the Fatih Mosque, now open for prayers. — AFP

Immigration to Canada sharply curtailed by virus

MONTREAL: Canada had hoped to welcome a record wave of immigrants in 2020 but will likely take in approximately half the previously expected number of people due to the coronavirus pandemic, a study published Friday showed. In March, the government announced that it planned to accommodate some 370,000 new permanent residents this year. But according to a new study by the Royal Bank of Canada, some 170,000 fewer immigrants are now likely to enter the country.

Ottawa announced its plan to allow a heightened number of immigrants just four days before Canada implemented travel restrictions that have virtually halted immigration. In 2019, Canada set a record with 341,000 new permanent residents. "We expect immigration levels to be down sharply in 2020," study author Andrew Agopsowicz said. "A recovery in 2021 will depend in part on the course of the pandemic."

Repercussions from the decrease will be felt throughout the economy, he said, given Canada's dependence on foreign labor and its ageing population. Some of the worst-off areas

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Unrest flares in US despite arrest of cop

MINNEAPOLIS: Violent protests erupted across the United States late Friday over the death of an unarmed black man at the hands of police, with murder charges laid against a Minneapolis officer failing to quell seething anger. Demonstrators clashed with police for a fourth straight night in the midwestern city of Minneapolis, where fires raged and

there was widespread looting as well as sustained cat-and-mouse clashes between protesters and police.

US President Donald Trump ordered soldiers prepare to deploy to the city, Minnesota National Guard Major General Jon Jensen confirmed early yesterday. The state has become the epicenter of violence since George Floyd died there in an arrest by an officer who pinned him to the ground for several minutes by kneeling on his neck.

Derek Chauvin was charged Friday with one count of third-degree murder — unintentionally causing a death — and one count of negligent manslaughter.

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MINNEAPOLIS: A man tries to tow away a car in a safe zone as another car catches fire in a local parking garage on Friday during a protest over the death of an unarmed black man. — AFP

Virus hopes, fears center on 'immunity'

PARIS: Could exposure to the coronaviruses that cause the common cold help protect against COVID-19? Is herd immunity closer than previously thought? As nations lift lockdowns and experts worry about a potential second peak in cases, our ability to ward off infection is one of the hottest topics of scientific debate.

Ever since it became apparent that children were

less vulnerable to COVID-19 early in the pandemic, scientists have speculated that the regular spread of benign viruses in places like schools could have bolstered their immune response to the latest coronavirus. Now the idea of "cross immunity" among the broader population is gaining some ground.

In a recent post on Twitter, Francois Balloux of University College London noted an "intriguing" lack of an immediate resurgence in COVID-19 cases following the easing of lockdowns in several countries. Among the possible explanations, he noted, were seasonality and enduring social distancing practices.

But he posited a "wilder" hypothesis as well — that a "proportion of the population might have pre-existing immunity to #SARSCoV2, potentially

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MEDELLIN, Colombia: A health worker distributes facemasks to locals as a preventive measure against the spread of COVID-19 in the Santa Cruz neighborhood on Friday. — AFP

Kuwait COVID-19 survivors share experience with disease

Workers lament being scheduled for work despite exposure to virus

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Frontliners are the most vulnerable section of the society today, battling on behalf of us to defeat the deadly coronavirus wreaking havoc throughout the world. In this war against the virus, they are the soldiers and the first to take the bullet. This is very true for a family of four who were all infected because "the light of the family", the mother, is a nurse at Sabah Hospital.

Speaking to Kuwait Times through Facebook Messenger, Nelia (not her real name), who is also a clinic instructor, shared her family's experience of COVID-19. She believed the virus infection started from her.

"On March 21 at our office at Sabah Hospital, a co-worker tested positive for the coronavirus. So the entire office staff had to be quarantined and tested. Two additional persons then tested positive. I was negative in the first test. After testing, we were told to go home for mandatory quarantine for 14 days. But in the middle of my 14-day quarantine, I experienced high fever and headache. I was swabbed again, and in the second test, I tested positive for the coronavirus," she said.

Following protocols

At home quarantine, Nelia said she followed the ministry of health protocols. "I never went out of my room. I was being cared for by my husband and two grown-up children at home. They used gloves and facemasks the moment they came near my room. All supplies were placed at the door and I would take them when they went back to their rooms. We were very careful about health ministry protocols because we knew the consequences. Since I was positive, I feared I might infect others in the family although we were in separate rooms. I wasn't wrong, as after three days, my family members got infected. They all experienced symptoms and they all tested positive," she said.

To this date, the virus has no specific medicine to cure patients. Some vaccines are being tested, but availability will not be anytime soon. Remedies and treatments being recommended by doctors are those that are already known to cure fever and headache, including paracetamol, antibiotics and vitamins to boost the immune system. Personal body hygiene and

observing cleanliness at home is also highly recommended.

"Steam inhalation and gargling with salty warm water helped us a lot. The steam inhalation made me sweat and I felt better with every session," Nelia said. "In the family, only my husband needed to be hospitalized, so I recommended him to be admitted to Sabah Hospital. But he was eventually transferred to Mishref temporary medical shelter for COVID patients. He is there now and recuperating," she said.

Both her daughters recovered, while she is scheduled for the next test on June 4. "I feel good now - my sense of taste is back. I can eat well and I know I am already victorious. I am 61 and my husband is 65 - we are in the most vulnerable group. It is only by His grace and prayers we survived this virus," Nelia said, noting that the most difficult and probably the most worrisome chapter of their lives in Kuwait was testing positive for the virus. Nelia joined the ministry of health at Sabah Hospital in 1986. Her husband was also a registered nurse at the same hospital, but retired and joined a church ministry in 2005.

'New cases every day'

Rob, a cooperative society worker in his 30s, also tested COVID-19 positive. He was swabbed along with his co-workers and after two days, the ministry of health informed him that he was COVID positive. He was asymptomatic. "My colleagues received messages over the phone from the ministry informing them whether they were positive or negative, but I received a call from the ministry saying I am COVID positive. The ministry instructed me to tell our boss about the result and that I should not go to work, which I relayed to my boss," Rob recalled.

He said since the lockdown began in March, they were transferred to the nearest school in the vicinity of their workplace and had been staying there. "We are living in a huge school building along with all the staff at co-ops. Then we were all swabbed. People who tested positive were transferred to another school compound in the area. We were about 36 cases, but now we have more - almost every day they are bringing new positive cases here," Rob told Kuwait Times.

Asked if there are doctors checking their health condition, he replied in the negative. "Since we were

transferred here, no doctors have come to check our health conditions. We were advised by our boss that in any emergency situation, we should call 112 for an ambulance," Rob said, adding that all food and medicines are provided by the company.

"We have vitamins and paracetamol - we are four people in one classroom. I regularly do steam inhalation, as it helps me a lot. I sometimes feel muscle pain, but maybe because of the daily exercise. Sometimes I have headache or cough, otherwise I am okay. I don't know when the ministry will come back to check our condition - maybe the company will instruct us to go to the clinic for the checkup. Many of us here are okay but COVID-19 positive," he said.

Rob was supposed to go for his annual vacation to the Philippines, but the lockdown was declared a few days before his departure. "I was supposed to be in the Philippines now, but because of the lockdown, I wasn't able to leave. So my boss told me to go back to work, so I went back, and got this COVID," he lamented.

'Not very serious'

He claimed co-op managers are not very serious in observing the ministry's guidelines in supermarkets. "While we have hand sanitizer and facemasks, there are no other measures taken by the management to protect workers - they only want money and our services, but they are poor in protecting their workers," he said.

As an example, he said if the workers are okay despite being suspected or exposed to COVID-positive cases, the management will still give them a schedule of duty. "Some of our bosses are not wearing facemasks or gloves at work. Social distancing is imposed but not for employees. So we cannot avoid being infected because customers are too many. Plus our work schedule is too tiring, a full 12 hours of duty. So maybe some of us got COVID because of our weak immune system and overwork - just like myself," Rob said.

Rob is now recuperating and counting the days until he will be officially declared COVID negative. "We are told to monitor our temperature and in case of difficulty in breathing, we should call the ambulance. We are all okay and so far, no emergency call has been made. Most of us here are asymptomatic - we just do whatever is necessary," he added.

In My View

No curfew...be aware



By Abdellatif Sharaa

local@kuwaittimes.com

I will not be saying the truth if I said I am not happy that the full curfew is no more; equally, I will not be truthful if I say that I am not worried! Being locked in the same place for over 20 consecutive days is not something easy at all, and any chance for a person to just step out in the open will be taken in a flash.

My fear is that there will be many waves of people rushing out to shops, markets or just being out, but will organizers be able to control the crowds at the gates, much less inside? I am afraid to say that it will be a very difficult process because of the sheer numbers. This could be the only time that requires us to police ourselves and act in a way that helps and protects us against the coronavirus and other diseases.

Pandemics are not new to this world as many took place throughout the course of history. One of these epidemics took place in the suburbs of Jerusalem. A town called Emwas was hit with a plague epidemic around 640 AD. People living there stayed in, while at that time Caliph Omar was about to enter Jerusalem, but was told not to do so because the rule was those in do not come out and those out do not go in. This process contained the disease and kept it to that area only.

I mentioned the story to give an example, and say if there is no curfew by authorities, it should be our discipline to remain at home unless it is absolutely necessary to go out, and once we are out, we should return home as soon as we finish our work.

I will never get tired or bored of reminding myself and others of taking precautions such as wearing a mask correctly (covering the nose and mouth), wearing gloves and washing your hands frequently, because they are the main carriers of the virus from one person to another.

Yes the curfew is lifted, yet the danger remains and caution is required. So, please be highly aware and do not let the joy of lifting of the curfew make you forget the danger of the virus, because the risk remains. The virus is there - it is not eradicated and there is no treatment or vaccine against it yet.

Be careful during the first day of lifting of the curfew, because it will be the time when yearning people will go out and cause crowding, and contacts may occur in various places. One more thing - please eat at home at this time, because some restaurants may have stocks that are old and unfit for consumption, and may get mixed with fresh supplies.

Final word: "A pandemic is like a fire and you are its fuel. Stay apart, so the fire will not find what keeps it alight and will die out." — Amr ibn Al-Aas

Coronavirus in Kuwait: What we know so far

KUWAIT: Kuwait has recorded 25,184 cases infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) as of Friday, in addition to 194 deaths. With the exception of 191 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, 9,273 people have recovered completely after previously being infected with the virus, while there are 15,717 people receiving treatment and 23 quarantined.

Curfew

Kuwait imposed a three-week partial curfew starting May 31, as part of a five-phase plan for a gradual return to normal life, brought to a standstill by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). The first phase also includes a total lockdown on Farwaniya, Khaitan, Hawally and Maidan Hawally, joining Mahboula and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh which were put under lockdown earlier.

Activities to resume in first phase included home deliveries of restaurants, telecommunication companies, food retailers, companies' transportation of employees, gas stations, private clinics and car workshops. The second phase will see the curfew shortened to be between 9:00 pm and 6:00 am, while resuming work in the government and private sectors with the workforce being less than 30 percent, in addition to resumption of constructions, banking sector, malls opening for eight hours and according to special instructions, parks and pickups from restaurants.

The third phase would see an end of curfew, and health authorities would be assessing situation of areas under lockdown. It would see increase of workforce to less than 50 percent. Visits for social care homes would be allowed, reopening of hotels, resorts and hotel apartments. Taxis will be allowed to operate with only one passenger, and Mosques would be allowed to perform Friday prayers.

Phase four would see an increase in workforce, restaurants would be receiving customers but with restrictions, and public transportation resumed but with distancing. All activities would resume in phase five, government and private sector returned to normal, families could gather, weddings and graduation ceremonies, health clubs and gyms to reopen, as well as cinemas and theaters.

Earlier, 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. Before that, 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 appoint-

ments 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 grades. State departments have been on high alert to take precautions against the potential spread of the virus. The Ministry of Commerce and Industry has taken measures to make sure that facial masks, hand sanitizers and other goods remain accessible to the public.

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

Hotlines

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

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

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

Medicine delivery

Kuwait's Ministry of Health (MOH) launched a new

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

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

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

Mental health assistance

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

- Dr Rashed Al-Sah: on Monday and Wednesday 10:00 am - 1:00 pm. Call 9797-6168.
 - Dr Fahad Al-Tasha: daily from 8:00 pm - 12:00 am. Call 9904-8258.
 - Dr Othman Al-Asfour: daily 5:00 pm - 8:00 pm. Call 9938-5350.
 - Dr Mohammed Al-Khaldi (head of this team): daily 9:00 am - 12:00 pm. Call 9903-6470.
 - Dr Ahmad Al-Khaldi: daily 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm. Call 9910-7965.
 - Dr Muneera Al-Qattan: Monday and Wednesday 9:00 am - 1:00 pm. Call 9953-3108.
 - Dr Zainab Al-Saffar: Sunday and Thursday 7:00 pm - 9:00 pm. Call 9954-9908.
 - Dr Sameera Al-Kandari: Tuesday 9:00 pm - 12:00 am. Call 6770-9434.
 - Dr Kawthar Al-Yaqout: Monday and Wednesday 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm. Call 5521-0088.
- For information and other concerns, call 9401-4283.

Kuwait Airways to lay off 1,500 foreign employees

KUWAIT: State-owned Kuwait Airways said Thursday it will lay off 1,500 expatriate employees due to "significant difficulties" caused by the coronavirus pandemic. The loss-making national carrier, which has a total of some 6,925 employees, has struggled amid the regional and worldwide downturn in air travel.

"In dealing with the coronavirus crisis and its negative impact on commercial operations... Kuwait Airways announces the termination of around 1,500 non-Kuwaiti employees," the airline said on Twitter.

It said the decision comes as part of a "comprehensive plan" to deal with the pandemic's economic impacts which meant the company is facing "significant difficulties". Kuwait, like other oil-rich Gulf states, has been severely hit by a slump in oil revenues and the economic impacts of coronavirus.

Kuwait Airways, which has a fleet of 30 aircraft, has been mostly grounded like almost all airlines in the Middle East due to the massive lockdowns. It however operated over 200 flights in late April and early May to repatriate some 30,000 Kuwaiti citizens from abroad.

The carrier's losses are paid by the government, which has not yet announced any special compensation. The International Air Transport Association forecast last month that air traffic in the Middle East and North Africa is set to tumble by more than a half.

IATA said that MENA airlines' revenues in 2020 will be slashed by \$24.5 billion compared to last year, and warned the region's aviation shutdown threatened some 1.2 million jobs. Private companies in Kuwait have fired hundreds of employees but the airline is the first government agency to take such action.

The Kuwait Municipality has said it would soon sack at least half of its 900 expatriate employees. Around 3.4 million foreigners live and work in Kuwait, making up some 70 percent of the Gulf state's population. — AFP

Local

Compliance with health instructions way to normal life: Sheikh Basel

Govt to provide Kuwaiti private sector employees six-month support



KUWAIT: Concrete barriers block the entrance to Hawally on May 29, 2020, after the area was put on lockdown to combat the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat



KUWAIT: Kuwait embarks today on a five-phase plan for a gradual return to normal life, brought to a standstill by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), starting with easing of curfew but locking down virus-hit areas. Minister of Health Dr Sheikh Basel Al-Sabah gave details of the plan, saying that each phase would last for three weeks. He said health authorities would give the go-ahead to move to the second phase if the assessment of the first phase was positive. However, if the health situation was not satisfactory, the phase could extend. "If indicators are positive we move to the next phase. If no indicators are safe in any phase, we will remain in the current phase for a longer time or go back to the previous phase," he said.

The first phase, he explained, includes partial curfew (from 6:00 pm to 6:00 am) coupled with a lockdown on Farwaniya, Khaitan and Hawally areas because they saw surge in cases. Sheikh Basel said activities to resume in first phase included home deliveries of restaurants, telecommunication companies, food retailers, companies' transportation of employees, gas stations, private clinics and car workshops. The second phase will see the curfew shorten to be between 9:00 pm and 6:00 am, said Sheikh Basel. In this phase, he said, workforce in government and private sectors should be less than 30 percent, in addition to resumption of constructions, banking sector, malls opening for eight hours and according to special instructions, parks and pickups from restaurants.

Sheikh Basel said the third phase would see an end of curfew, and health authorities would be assessing situation of areas under lockdown. He said phase three would see increase of workforce to less than 50 percent. He added visits for social care homes would be allowed, reopening of hotels, resorts and hotel apartments. Taxis will be allowed to operate with only one passenger, and Mosques would be allowed to perform Friday prayers.

Phase four, said the Minister of health, would see an increase in workforce, restaurants would be receiving customers but with restrictions, and public transportation resumed but with distancing. Sheikh Basel said all activities would resume in phase five, government and private sector returned to normal, families could gather, weddings and graduation ceremonies, health clubs and gyms to reopen, as well as cinemas and theaters.

Compliance with instructions

Sheikh Basel said success of phases depended on compliance with health instructions, like two-meter physical distancing, covering mouth and nose, hand wash and stay home. He urged the public to be extra careful with senior citizens who suffered from chronic diseases. "Failure to comply with these instructions could cause a setback and we go back to the previous step," he warned. There will not be a normal life without a vaccine or a drug, he said. Sheikh Basel addressed a message to all people in Kuwait: "Cooperate, be optimistic and don't let down."

Government spokesman Tareq Al-Mezrem, at an online news conference from Seif Palace, said the cabinet eased the curfew to be for 12 hours: from 6:00 pm to 6:00 am. He said the holiday of the public sector, originally due until May 28, would be extended until a further notice. The cabinet assigned ministers to prepare for the return of normal work. Mezrem, said the government decided to impose lockdown on Farwaniya with exception of areas between streets: 60, 120, 502 and 129. Blocks four, six, seven, eight and nine of Khaitan will be under lockdown, while the whole of Hawally, Nuqra and Maidan Hawally would be closed, said Mezrem. He added a lockdown on Mahboula and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh would continue.

Defeating the coronavirus

The five-phase plan takes into consideration health, economic and social aspects with main objective of defeating the coronavirus. His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah said Thursday. "We adopt a plan for gradual return to normal life, based on experiences of many countries, prepared by experts and specialists," he told an online press conference following a cabinet meeting. This plan, he added, takes into consideration health, economic and social aspects, and to gradually open based on health indicators which will show the degree of compliance with health instructions and to live up to social responsibility. He said "we cannot

continue with complete closure and the country should resume operation and to live with this pandemic."

"Today is different than previous months, we learned many lessons and know how this pandemic is easy to spread," added His Highness the Prime Minister, citing collapse of health systems and economies of many countries around the world. However, he added, the success was compliance with the health instructions. He added the plan included many policies about social behavior, hygiene, transport and activities in many sectors, as well as taking into account recoveries and infections. His Highness the Prime Minister acknowledged they did not know how this pandemic would end with no drug or vaccine available. "We lived harsh experience," he said. However, the upcoming phase would be a "challenge to the awareness of the society and how to work together against this pandemic to defeat it," he said.

Six-month support

Meanwhile, the cabinet approved the disbursement of financial support to business owners and the national workforce in the private sector for a period

of up to six months, a minister said on Thursday. The cabinet is sparing no effort in providing job security for the national workforce in light of the exceptional circumstances the country is going through, caused by the coronavirus pandemic. Minister for Social Affairs and State Minister for Economic Affairs Mariam Al-Aqeel said in a statement. This support comes as part of an economic stimulus package aimed at ensuring the stability of employment conditions of nationals in the private sector and due to the cabinet's commitment to strike a balance in the contractual relationship between business owners and Kuwaiti employees in the private sector, she explained.

The decision, reached on May 18, also aims at protecting the national workforce's interests, ensuring job stability for them, and alleviating the burdens on employers, including owners of small and medium enterprises, affected by these exceptional circumstances. Upon receiving the sums, businesses will be legally bound not to terminate the services of their employed nationals or reducing their salaries until the end of June 2021. The Public Authority for Manpower has been assigned to disburse those affected on an urgent basis, Aqeel said. — KUNA



Police officers man checkpoints at the entrances leading to Hawally on May 29, 2020, after the district was put on lockdown.

CONDOLENCES

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

deepest condolences to

Al-Taneeb family

on the sad demise of

**Jassem Mohammad
Ahmad Al-Taneeb**
(Abu Mohammad)

General Assembly member and head of the public relations
committee at Kuwait Journalists Association

Journalist at Al-Anbaa newspaper

May Allah Almighty bestow His mercy on him

Local

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Mask-clad residents take a walk in a neighbourhood of Kuwait City on May 28, 2020, as authorities allowed people to exercise for two hours amid a nationwide lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwait interior undersecretary visits correctional facilities



KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ministry of Interior (MoI) Undersecretary Major General Essam Al-Naham visited on Thursday correctional institutions examining security and health measures designed to maintain prisoners' health and wellbeing. Major General Talal Maarefi, Assistant Undersecretary for Correctional Facilities and Sentences Execution at Ministry of Interior, briefed the undersecretary during the tour about health precautionary measures for the inmates, according to guidelines set by relevant health authorities. Dr Ali Radaan, Director of Kuwait Central Prison

Hospital, briefed Maj Gen Naham about executed procedures to prevent breakout of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) inside the facilities. Newcomers are isolated for four weeks and subjected to swab tests, Dr Al-Radaan has said, speaking about some of the regular precautions. He has also acknowledged some prisoners sickened with the contagion have been sequestered and given required medical care. The undersecretary, during the tour, spoke directly with some of the prisoners who apprised him of some of their humanitarian hardships. —KUNA



Kuwait receives oil derivatives' tanker from South Korea

KUWAIT: Kuwait Oil Tanker Company (KOTC) has officially taken delivery of the petroleum by-products tanker "Safasafa" from the South Korean ship builder, Hyundai Mipo Dockyard. KOTC Chief Executive Officer Ali Shehab said in a press statement on Thursday the new tanker joined the company fleet as part of the fourth phase of its overhaul. A contract signed with Hyundai, on April 24, 2018, stipulates construction and delivery of eight oil



tankers of various sizes and specifications to Kuwait, Shehab affirmed. With "Safasafa," the KOTC fleet now comprises 31 tankers of various specifications, he said, also noting that it was built according to international environmental safety standards. —KUNA

Ministry inspects 63 cooperatives, supermarkets

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Commerce and Industry has stated that its teams have inspected 63 cooperative societies, supermarkets and pharmacies to ensure the flow of purchases and food deliveries

and price stability. In a press statement on Friday, the ministry pointed out that its teams also visited 79 subsidized food outlets and vowed that it will continue to dispatch its inspection teams around the country during the coronavirus lockdown measures. Some 120 consumer complaints were received by the ministry on its 135 hotline. The need to comply with laws and regulations amid these unprecedented circumstances was strongly underlined, and the ministry warned it would be on the lookout for those seeking to take advantage of the current situation. —KUNA

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E: info@kuwaittimes.net

Local

EU: Kuwait pledges \$100 million to Coronavirus Global Response

Kuwait Amir's representative partakes in Int'l meeting on COVID-19

BRUSSELS: The European Union Friday published a full list of the countries and the amount they pledged at the Coronavirus Global Response virtual event held on 4 May hosted by the European Commission. Kuwait has pledged \$100 million for the Coronavirus Global Response, according to the EU list. The Commission said in a statement that Coronavirus Global Response has so far raised 9.8 billion euro (\$10.8 billion), 2.3 billion euro (\$2.5 billion) more than expected. The outcome of the 4 May pledging event shows the willingness and capacity of the world to join forces and pool resources to overcome the pandemic, it noted.

Meanwhile, Kuwait's Ambassador to the EU, Belgium and NATO Jaseem Al-Budaiwi in a statement to the press underlined the importance of Kuwait's participation in the global event. He stated that the participation of Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Sabah, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Kuwait, who was representing His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Amir of the State of Kuwait, is in line with "the framework of constructive interaction that the State of Kuwait attaches to its cooperation with the international community, particularly in combating the Corona pandemic."

He noted the State of Kuwait donated \$40 million at this conference, which was organized by the European Union on 4 May 2020, in addition to its previous donation of \$60 million. Ambassador Al-Budaiwi underlined that the role of the State of Kuwait in this global framework will not end and that international coordination and cooperation with the global community will continue until this pandemic is eliminated. He indicated that Kuwait will continue to share its experiences with the virus with other countries in order to mutually benefit in the fight against the coronavirus. He further stated that the \$100 million donation by

the State of Kuwait to combat the spread of the virus has three goals, to discover a vaccine, find a cure for the virus and increase development of diagnosis ability. In this context, Ambassador Al-Budaiwi stressed the importance of diplomacy in increasing solidarity among the international community and uniting efforts to confront the common threats facing the world.

In a related development, the pledging marathon that started on 4 May will now see the launch of a new campaign with the international advocacy organisation Global Citizen: Global Goal: Unite For Our Future, that will culminate in a Global Pledging Summit on Saturday 27 June. Together with the Global Citizen, the European Commission said, it will step up the mobilisation of funding to enable the world to overcome this pandemic and avoid another.

COVID-19 meeting

Representing His Highness the Amir, Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Sabah headed Kuwait's delegation at a senior-level international meeting themed "development in era and post COVID-19." The conference was held Thursday in response to an invitation from the prime ministers of Canada, Jamaica and the United Nations Secretary General, for coordinating international efforts to find tangible and rapid solutions to challenges facing the world due to spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). Conferees have exchanged ideas and visions toward repercussions of the pandemic. The State of Kuwait delegation at the online conference included Minister Plenipotentiary Nasser Abdullah Al-Hayen, the assistant foreign minister for international organizations' affairs, and a number of senior officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

UN notes Kuwait's humanitarian efforts

Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammed also received on Thursday a telephone call from Mark Lowcock, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, during which Lowcock apprised the minister about new developments with respect of regional humanitarian conditions. The UN Under-Secretary applauded the vital role that has been played by the State of Kuwait at the humanitarian level, expressing gratitude and appreciation for this eminent and distinguished role at the regional and international levels.



KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Sabah participates in a senior-level international meeting themed "development in era and post COVID-19" via video conference. —KUNA

Int'l efforts

In the meantime, Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Sabah contacted Spanish Minister for Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation Arancha Gonzalez Laya. During the phone conversation, both ministers discussed bilateral and international efforts to fight the fallout of the novel coronavirus. Sheikh Ahmad Nasser offered sincere con-

dolences to Spain and its people over COVID-19 victims, wishing that the virus crisis would end very soon. He also thanked Spanish authorities for having facilitated the repatriation of Kuwaiti nationals from Spain, and stressed joint cooperation between both friendly countries in response to the pandemic.

Both sides underlined that it is essential to exert concerted international efforts to mitigate the reflections of the crisis and to back the role of international organizations in this regard. The Spanish foreign minister, in turn, thanked Kuwait for having made it easy for Spaniards to return home, while speaking highly of Kuwait's response to the global pandemic. Also during the phone conversation, both foreign ministers addressed close and firm relations between both friendly countries, along with the latest regional and international political developments. —KUNA

Kuwait Red Crescent delivers aid to Syrians

AMMAN: Kuwait Red Crescent Society distributed 1,000 food parcels to Syrian refugee and poor families as part of a humanitarian campaign themed "Solidarity 2020" to help the deprived in Jordan. Kuwait's Ambassador to Jordan Aziz Al-Dihani said in a statement to the press on Friday first phase of

this campaign started in Ramadan, during which the society distributed 2,000 food parcels. Kuwait has continuously aided the Syrians since eruption of the crisis in their country in 2011 — in line with instructions by His Highness the Amir, Leader of the Humanitarian Action, Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. Ambassador Dihani has affirmed necessity of such aid under current circumstances caused by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). Meanwhile, head of the Jordanian Red Crescent Dr Mohammad Al-Hadid said that Syrian refugees' conditions became harder amid spread of the pandemic and this dire situation prompted the society to seek help from its Kuwaiti counterpart. — KUNA



Statement on GCC Relations

Realizing the critical condition of the Gulf Cooperation Council, and the importance of serious consideration of potential significant changes and developments, including the serious health impact of the coronavirus pandemic on our societies (like other countries in the world), and the unprecedented pressures on our national resources which would negatively affect our economies and our future livelihood, and the change of international relations dynamics that will also affect our regional and international relations, we, the undersigned, see it is important, as we are about to enter the fourth year of the painful GCC rift, to underscore the necessity to take the best precautions in mitigating the risks involving the Gulf region, and to push again for a reconciliation led by the wise in our countries to converge views. We are inspired by the same geography and long joint history in addition to the integrated social fabric of the GCC communities which affirm the unity of human and interest. The continuation of the split will allow for external intervention in our affairs and will increase the opportunity for those who do not wish for this region to enjoy stability, security and development that the successive generations deserve after long years of suffering and hardships. We see some serious attempts in fishing in muddy waters and amplifying differences to bring us apart.

We also realize that the post-coronavirus world will be different. There are many challenging variables, and the best way to confront the negative impacts is to unite, get pass the disagreements, and to look for real and serious opportunities for reconciliation and renouncement of discord and for harnessing the available diplomatic, economic and human resources to confront the growing challenges awaiting us. We should bravely approach an effective and consistent policy to push back the causes of conflict and prioritize reconciliation and joint interests which are more fruitful, because there are more many things that bring us together than the few things that separate us, which can be subject to rational discussion and settlement. It is a mistake to think that the separation of our states is the rescue from the high waves of the sea which we will face after the big crisis of today. The crisis showed us the many steps that we need to take as a harmonious group that is not only united by interests, but also by historical familial ties. Lifeline, as perceived by many of the people of the region, is to seriously and honestly consider the emerging economic, social or strategic threats and map out collective plans to face these threats which is in the great interest of all of our communities and their security and stability.

We hope that our call is received by the ears, hearts and minds of the officials and the other segments of the GCC peoples and we appeal to everyone to find rational and peaceful solutions in line with the human wisdom: the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. We pray Allah that the decision-makers in our region are guided to the good of the region.

The signed (with no titles and in Arabic alphabet order)

- | No. | Name |
|-----|--|
| 1. | Ibrahim Abdulaziz Al-Beayez |
| 2. | Ahmed Abdullah Al-Sarraf |
| 3. | Ahmed Abdullah Al-Musfir |
| 4. | Anwar Ali Al-Naqi |
| 5. | Anwar Mustafa Al-Ghanim |
| 6. | Anisa Ahmed Fakhro |
| 7. | Badr Hamad bin Issa |
| 8. | Badriya bint Ibrahim bin Khalfan Al-Shihi |
| 9. | Jassim Mohammed Khalaf |
| 10. | Ja'far Ismail Behbahani |
| 11. | Jamal Khalid Al-Hajji |
| 12. | Juma bin Saleh Al-Ghailani |
| 13. | Hamid Al-Rasheed Al-Badr |
| 14. | Hamid Saleh Al-Saif |
| 15. | Hassan Ali Hussein Al-Nema |
| 16. | Khalid Ahmed Al-Tarrah |
| 17. | Khalid Ibrahim Marafie |
| 18. | Khalid Jaber Al-Jaber |
| 19. | Khalid Mohammed Al-Maghamis |
| 20. | Khalfan bin Saif bin Mohammed Al-Tawqi |
| 21. | Rahma bint Hamad bin Mohammed Al-Mashrifia |
| 22. | Radhi Muhsin Al-Musawai |
| 23. | Riyadh Ali Al-Rabiya |
| 24. | Sajid Mutib Al-Abdali |
| 25. | Salem bin Abdullah bin Salem Al-Kabi |
| 26. | Salem bin Mohammed bin Masoud Al-Riyami |
| 27. | Sami Abdullatif Al-Nisf |
| 28. | Siraj Saleh Al-Baker |
| 29. | Sorour Abdulrahman Al-Samaraie |
| 30. | Saeed bin Mubarak bin Saeed Al-Mahrani |
| 31. | Salman Abdulhamid Al-Nassar |
| 32. | Salma Ali Al-Nuaimi |
| 33. | Sabah Mohammed Al-Rayes |
| 34. | Talal Saqr Al-Qatami |
| 35. | Adel Hussein Al-Essa |
| 36. | Adel Sami Al-Sultan |
| 37. | Amer Dhiyab Al-Tamimi |
| 38. | Abdulhamid Ismail Al-Ansari |
| 39. | Abdulkhalik Abdullah Abdulrahman |
| 40. | Abdulaziz Mohammed Al-Sarie |
| 41. | Abdullah Saleh Babood |
| 42. | Abdulmajid Khalil Al-Qattan |
| 43. | Abdul Muhsin Taqi Mudhaffar |
| 44. | Abdulnabi Hussein Al-Ekry |
| 45. | Abdulwahhab Rashid Al-Haroun |
| 46. | Ali Ibrahim Al-Nukhailan |
| 47. | Ali Ahmed Al-Tarrah |
| 48. | Ali Yusuf Al-Sanad |
| 49. | Emad Suleiman Al-Saif |
| 50. | Omar Abdul Aziz Al-Ali Al-Mutawa |
| 51. | Fotouh Hamad Al-Dalali |
| 52. | Farida Mohammed Al-Habib |
| 53. | Faisal Turki Al-Matrouk |
| 54. | Faisal Rashid Al-Ghaies |
| 55. | Muayad Hamad Musaed Al-Saleh |
| 56. | Majid bin Saeed bin Salem Al-Rawah |
| 57. | Muhsin Abul Saddiq |
| 58. | Mohammed bin Abdullah bin Hamad Al-Harithi |
| 59. | Mohammed Jawad Behbahani |
| 60. | Mohammed Ali Al-Naqi |
| 61. | Mohammed Ghanim Al-Rumaihi |
| 62. | Mohammed Fadhil Khalaf |
| 63. | Marzouq Bashir Marzouq |
| 64. | Marwan Ahmed Salama |
| 65. | Masaud Jawhar Hayat |
| 66. | Muna Mohammed Bourisly |
| 67. | Munther Bader Al-Essa |
| 68. | Hilal bin Mussallam bin Ali Al-Busaidi |
| 69. | Yusuf Abdulhamid Al-Jassim |
| 70. | Yousef Abdulla Al-Awadhi |
| 71. | Khaled Ebrahim Marafi |
| 72. | Monther Bader Al-Esa |

International

SUNDAY, MAY 31, 2020



Trump strips Hong Kong its privileges

Mediterranean sorrow as virus upends greeting rituals

Page 8

Page 7



MANILA: Workers ride their bicycles home in Manila. Bicycle sales have skyrocketed with some shops selling 300-400 units over the past two days since the Philippine government began easing quarantine measures to curb the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic. —AFP

Misinformation fuels panic in Asia

COVID-19: A deluge of online info and hoaxes

HONG KONG: False alerts about a man shot dead at a coronavirus checkpoint, old footage of a supermarket stampede in reports of panic buying, and a 2015 video of a police raid on a brothel recirculated with a misleading claim. A deluge of online misinformation and hoaxes during the coronavirus crisis is stoking fear and confusion across Asia, where violators of lockdown rules can face jail and hefty fines in some countries. AFP has produced more than 150 lockdown-related misinformation reports across the region since February, when governments beyond China began introducing restrictions to curb the spread of COVID-19. The hoaxes are created by a wide array of people with varying motives - from those looking to discredit governments and deepen religious divides, to pranksters - and then shared widely as fact.

In April, a hoax was shared on Facebook in the Philippines post its lockdown suggesting a motorcyclist had been shot dead for ignoring a virus checkpoint. In fact, the footage - which was viewed tens of thousands of times in multiple posts - was of a police training drill. Some users were outraged, and questioned the purportedly fatal use of force by the police, which has long been accused of human rights abuses and led President Rodrigo Duterte's controversial war on drugs. But others suggested the man had been "hard-headed" and was justly punished for stubbornly ignoring the checkpoint, echoing the types of sentiments from Duterte's supporters who have cheered on

the thousands of drug war deaths.

Other misinformation circulated in the Philippines has included doctored advisories about lockdown extensions and false posts about anti-government protesters flouting gathering bans. Elsewhere in Asia, a Facebook post in Thailand included a video purporting to show panicked buyers scrambling for goods in Malaysia after it implemented a strict lockdown. Thai Facebook users - who viewed the video hundreds of thousands of times - shared it with comments expressing worry there would be similar scenes in Thailand. The clip, in fact, showed shoppers in Brazil on Black Friday, an annual day of sales, in November 2019. "(Misinformation) has fuelled a lot of uncertainty and anxiety among people," said Yvonne Chua, an associate professor of journalism at the University of the Philippines.

Face masks, panic buying

The online mayhem has taken a greater hold when governments have communicated poorly, according to Axel Bruns, a media professor at the Queensland University of Technology in Australia. "It seems to me the more effective government communication has been about lockdowns, but really about all aspects of their coronavirus response, the less foothold there has been for mis- and disinformation," Bruns said. In Thailand, where movement restrictions were imposed in March, anxiety spread over misleading messages saying people who did not wear face masks in public would be fined

200 Thai baht (\$6). The misinformation quickly spread on Facebook, Twitter and the messaging app Line, and Thai police were forced to refute the claim in a press conference. But less than a month later, however, some provinces did introduce much harsher fines for those who failed to wear face masks, further fueling confusion.

In Pakistan, where coronavirus restrictions were recently relaxed, one hoax video suggested shoppers had attempted to flee a store after police discovered it had ignored the lockdown. But that video was actually of a police raid on a brothel in 2015. Many Pakistani users pointed out that the clip was old, but not before it was viewed tens of thousands of times on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and WhatsApp. In neighboring India, misinformation has also been rife after a nationwide lockdown was imposed in March. Prominent misleading posts have included political smears, rumors about extreme lockdown measures and misinformation intended to stoke religious tensions. One graphic video of an axe attack was viewed tens of thousands of times in false posts on Facebook and Twitter, with claims it showed Islamist extremists killing a Hindu man during the lockdown.

In reality, the video showed an attack in Pakistan. While some social media users identified the clip as from abroad, others appeared misled by it, suggesting it was evidence that India needed "army rule". Bruns said the deluge of misinformation was partly due to governments' inability to adequately reassure their citizens. "The cir-



NEW DELHI: People with coronavirus symptoms wait in queue for a COVID-19 test at an ayurvedic hospital during a lockdown imposed as a preventive measure against the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus. —AFP

ulation of misinformation is increased during such times because people are desperately looking for answers to their questions about what's happening, why, and what they can do to protect themselves," said Bruns. "And if they can't find enough satisfactory answers from official sources, they'll start to look elsewhere." — AFP

In the US, camera phones increasingly expose racism

NEW YORK: From the death of a black man in Minneapolis to a racist incident in Central Park, camera phones are increasingly being used as a weapon against racism even when justice doesn't always follow. Two videos shot on smartphones spread from social media to mainstream media this week, highlighting how bystanders are now frequently capturing incidents that in the past may have gone unnoticed. It was a member of the public who filmed George Floyd grasping for breath as a white Minneapolis policeman pressed his knee on Floyd's neck for at least five minutes on Monday. Floyd went still and was later declared dead in hospital. Four police officers were fired from their jobs but remain free and the city has witnessed two nights of angry protests.

"If we did not have a video, would the officers have been fired as quickly? Ibram Kendi, director of the American University's anti-racism research center, asked in an interview with Democracy Now! "Would they have believed all of those witnesses who were looking at what was happening and who was the asking officers to stop? In the second incident, a white woman falsely reported Christian Cooper, an avid birdwatcher to police after he requested that she leash her dog in a wooded area of New York's Central Park. "I'm going to tell them there's an African-American man threatening my life," she told Cooper as he filmed her dial 911 in a video that has been viewed over 43 million times on Twitter.

In February, Ahmaud Arbery - also African American

- was shot and killed by two white residents while jogging in their neighborhood in Georgia. A third man, who was later also charged over Arbery's death, filmed the murder, with the cellphone video sparking outrage when it was leaked onto social media earlier this month. The filming of such violent incidents is not new. Since the beating of Rodney King by Los Angeles police in 1991, which was filmed by an amateur cameraman, videos have frequently documented acts of racism across the United States.

But in recent years the capturing of such incidents, with them subsequently going viral online and then being broadcast across major news networks, has become more systematic. "Here's the sad reality," tweeted Senator Kamala Harris, a black former candidate to be the Democratic Party's presidential candidate. "What happened to George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery & Christian Cooper has gone on for generations to Black Americans. Cell phones just made it more visible." Kathryn Russell-Brown, director of the Center for the Study of Race and Race Relations at the University of Florida, said the videos remind us that "wherever people of color are there's a vulnerability.

"I would be hard pressed to think of cases involving Whites that show the same kind of instances of harm and assault particularly if we're talking about law enforcement," she told AFP. The increased use of police officers wearing body cameras while on duty over the past decade had raised hopes that the use of force against African Americans would fall. But after initial studies showed encouraging results, more in-depth reports found that "the cameras aren't producing the reductions in use of force that were expected," according to Urban Institute researcher Daniel Lawrence. Many forces allow officers to turn the cameras off whenever they want, while some have been accused of editing the images before making them public. —AFP

George Floyd: 'Gentle giant' killed by police

MINNEAPOLIS: The black man who left Houston for fresh beginnings in Minneapolis, only to end up begging for his life before dying under the knee of a white policeman, was a generous soul laid off during the coronavirus crisis. "Everybody loved my brother," Philonise Floyd said Tuesday, one day after George Floyd perished, sparking massive protests and renewing accusations of systemic racism in America. "He's a gentle giant," he told CNN. "He don't hurt anybody." The late 46-year-old had come north and found work as a trucker and more recently a security guard at a restaurant, Conga Latin Bistro, before business dried up during Minnesota's stay-at-home order.

"He would just keep us safe there, you know?" Luz Maria Gonzalez, who regularly ate at the restaurant, told National Public Radio. "At the end of the night, he'd say, 'Hey, Luz, I want to wait until you get into your cab.'" Others close to Floyd described him as taking steps to improve his life. "I remember him saying he wanted to touch the world. He wanted to have a worldwide impact," Jonathan Veal, a friend since the sixth grade, told broadcaster KPRC in Houston, where they attended Jack Yates High School together. Floyd, at an imposing six feet six (two meters), became a star athlete in basketball and football, and dabbled in hip hop music.

But he left Houston when it became hard to find work. Veal said he last communicated with Floyd in January, when they exchanged text messages. "A few things

I gotta get strait for my lil ones," Floyd wrote Veal. "My faith is getting back where it supposed to be." But on May 25, following nine agonizing minutes caught on video, Floyd was gone, after an officer pressed his knee into Floyd's neck for several minutes as he lay on the street, unarmed and handcuffed. "Please, please I can't breathe," Floyd is heard saying in the viral video. Police have described him as the suspect in a forgery case at a grocery store, where the clerk called 911 Monday after Floyd apparently used counterfeit money to buy cigarettes.

Bridgett Floyd said her brother wasn't perfect, but that it was "heartbreaking" for him to die at the hands of police. "That's exactly what they did," she told NBC News. "They murdered my brother. He was crying for help." Four policemen were fired over the incident. One, Derek Chauvin, was arrested Friday and charged with third-degree murder. Floyd's girlfriend, Courtney Ross, was adamant that he had remained a shining light in the community. "This is nothing but an angel that was sent to us on earth," she told CBS News. "And we demonized him, and we killed him."

Floyd reportedly had two children. Roxie Washington, the mother of his six-year-old daughter in Houston, described him as a devoted father. "People mistake him because he was so big that they thought he was always a fighting person," Washington said, according to the Houston Chronicle. "But he was a loving person... and he loved his daughter." One of Floyd's longtime friends, Stephen Jackson, became an NBA basketball star, but Floyd never let that change their friendship. "We called each other Twin," Jackson said in an emotional video post on Instagram. "He was changing his life," moving to Minnesota for work so he could support his children, Jackson added. "My boy was doing what he was supposed to do, man, and you all go and kill my brother." — AFP

International

Brazil's COVID-19 death toll hits 27,878, surpassing hard-hit Spain

Poor and black, northeast Brazil faces virus 'hurricane'

RIO DE JANEIRO: Brazil on Friday reached 27,878 coronavirus deaths, official figures showed, surpassing the toll of hard-hit Spain and making it the country with the fifth-highest number of fatalities. The epicenter of the South American coronavirus outbreak, Brazil saw 1,124 deaths in 24 hours, the Ministry of Health said. It also had a record number of new cases - 26,928 in one day - bringing the total number of infections to 465,166. The United States, Britain, Italy and France lead the world in coronavirus deaths. As of Friday Spain had recorded 27,121 deaths, with virus fatalities there rapidly slowing.



465,166
infected

Brazil could soon surpass France, which has seen 28,714 deaths. Brazil is second in the number of confirmed cases, though trailing far behind the United States which has 1.7 million infections. Brazil has seen 131.2 coronavirus deaths per one million people - compared to more than 300 in the United States and 580 in Spain - but the pandemic has yet to peak in the South American country. "There is no way to foresee" when the outbreak will peak, the Ministry of Health said, and experts say the number of cases in Brazil could be 15 times higher than the confirmed figure because there has been no widespread testing.

Virus 'hurricane'

Brazil's northeast, a harsh place of arid land, cyclical drought and crushing poverty, is emerging as the next

crisis zone in the coronavirus pandemic. As the virus surges in Brazil - which now has the second-most cases in the world after the United States - the country's poorest region has been hit hard, both by the disease and the painful measures taken to contain it. The nine states of the northeast have the second-highest number of cases and deaths in Brazil, after the wealthy southeast, where the outbreak began. For the 7.7 million people in the northeast who live on less than \$2 a day, getting by is hard in the best of times. Add lockdowns that have interrupted the meager services they depend on - things like school lunches for hungry children and water deliveries for those who have none - and they are being pushed to the brink.

"In 26 years, I've never seen so many people living in fear, so many people going hungry," said Alcione Albanesi, founder of the charity Amigos do Bem. "Everything has ground to a stop. But hunger doesn't stop." Her organization distributes food, water and hygiene supplies to communities in the hot, dry Sertao, or "back-country," where many families scrape out a living farming the cracked, unforgiving earth. Preventive measures such as hand-washing are theoretical there, at best. Many people barely have water. Those who get sick often face a long trip to the nearest town in an oxcart, then several hours of public transportation to the hospital. When they arrive, hospitals sometimes lack basic supplies, even bed sheets, said Albanesi.



RIO DE JANEIRO: Cemetery workers wearing protective clothing bury a victim of COVID-19 at the Sao Francisco Xavier cemetery in Rio de Janeiro. — AFP

Migrants turned vectors

The pandemic is accelerating fast in the northeast, spreading from coastal capitals such as Salvador, Recife and Fortaleza to the interior. In early April, the region had 17.6 percent of the total coronavirus cases in Brazil. Today, the proportion has risen to 33.7 percent. The region has registered nearly 150,000 cases, and almost 8,000 deaths, out of 27,000 nationwide. It is no coin-

idence its caseload has followed close on the heels of that of the southeast, the business and industrial corridor that includes Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Countless migrants who left the northeast to work in the southeast lost their jobs because of stay-at-home measures. Brazilian media have documented how many of them are returning home, taking clandestine buses that use dirt roads to skirt lockdown measures. — Agencies

'Water is life': COVID exposes chronic crisis in Navajo Nation

THOREAU: Amanda Larson pulls up at a water station a few miles from her home in the Navajo Nation and her three children get to work filling up large bottles lying on the bed of her pickup truck. The 66 gallons will be used by her family for drinking, washing clothes and bathing - before the next trip out in two or three days to repeat the back-breaking task.



COUNSELOR: Marlene Thomas hands out donated homemade mask while Navajo families wait in line to receive food, water, and other supplies in Counselor on the Navajo Nation Reservation, New Mexico. — AFP

"It's embarrassing, it's degrading, it's heartbreaking for my kids because they can't jump into a shower like everybody else and just wash," the 35-year-old preschool teacher tells AFP after returning to her pre-fabricated home in Thoreau, which lies in the southeast corner of this sovereign territory, the United States' largest Native American reservation. "This is how we get ready for school, this is how my husband and I are getting ready for work, in these two totes," she says, pointing to large plastic containers placed inside the bathtub.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Washing your hands is easy, and it's one of the most effective ways to prevent the spread of germs," advice it has relentlessly emphasized over the course of the coronavirus pandemic.

That's just not possible for an estimated 30 to 40 percent of the Nation's 178,000 residents, who don't have access to running water or sanitation. This is seen as a major reason behind the surge in COVID-19 cases within the territory, with nearly 5,000 confirmed infections and 160 deaths - one of the highest per capita fatality rates in the country.

Two million Americans without water

"Water is life," say the Navajo, who prefer to call themselves "Dine" and their land "Dinetah." These three words are spray painted on walls throughout a geographically diverse territory that stretches 27,400 square miles (about the size of Scotland)

across Arizona, Utah and New Mexico, a land of arid deserts with striking sandstone formations that give way to high plateaus and alpine forests.

It's a sentiment also reflected in place names: Sweetwater, Many Farms Lake, Willow Spring. But these names often no longer reflect reality. Rising temperatures and declining rainfall led to a decrease in the area's surface water by an estimated 98 percent over the 20th century, according to a report by water nonprofit DigDeep. Chronic neglect by the government is another aspect to this story, says George McGraw, who founded DigDeep in 2012 to help communities in Sub-Saharan Africa but who has since shifted his focus to America. — AFP

COVID-19 hopes and fears centre on 'immunity'

PARIS: Could exposure to the coronaviruses that cause the common cold help protect against COVID-19? Is herd immunity closer than previously thought? As nations lift lockdowns and experts worry about a potential second peak in cases, our ability to ward off infection is one of the hottest topics of scientific debate. Ever since it became apparent that children were less vulnerable to COVID-19 early in the pandemic, scientists have speculated that the regular spread of benign viruses in places like schools could have bolstered their immune response to the latest coronavirus. Now the idea of "cross immunity" among the broader population is gaining some ground. In a recent post on Twitter, Francois Balloux of University College London noted an "intriguing" lack of an immediate resurgence in COVID-19 cases following the easing of lockdowns in several countries.

Among the possible explanations, he noted, were seasonality and enduring social distancing practices. But he posited a "wilder" hypothesis as well - that a "proportion of the population might have pre-existing immunity to #SARSCoV2, potentially due to prior exposure to 'common cold' coronaviruses". Balloux said that might explain issues like cases where there is no transmission between spouses. Earlier this month, an American study in the journal Cell suggested between 40 and 60 percent of the population could be immunized against COVID-19 without ever being exposed to it.

Researchers put this down to the action of protective cells, known as T lymphocytes, that had been activated by other coronaviruses responsible for colds. But authors Alessandro Sette and Shane Crotty, of La Jolla Institute for Immunology, cautioned that the research did not suggest the epidemic was running out of steam. "Clearly some individuals are more susceptible to the disease than others: after being infected some individuals have severe clinical symptoms and might even die, while others might show very little in terms of clinical symptoms," they told AFP by email. "Our study suggests that preexisting immunity might be one of the factors to be considered; but at this point is simply an hypothesis that needs to be addressed with further experiments."

'Jury out'

The World Health Organization has also expressed caution over



PARIS: People sit and drink on a cobble pavement in Paris ahead of the re-opening of the French capital's cafe terraces, scheduled for June 2, as France eases lockdown measures. — AFP

the issue. "There is certainly some evidence with regard to T cells, that if you have a previous coronavirus infection you may be able to mount a more rapid response to COVID-19," said the WHO's Michael Ryan at a press conference this week. "But there's no empirical evidence that previous coronavirus infections protect you from infection with COVID-19. The jury is still very much out on that," he added. However, Ryan said it was an encouraging sign for the development of vaccines. "It gives us hope that we are getting the kinds of immune responses that may be helpful to long-term protection," he said. — AFP

Can we finally learn?

By Yap-Seng Chong, Tikki Pangestu, and Swaine Chen

Recently, the Washington Post published a sobering illustration of pandemics throughout history. The illustration shows that the number of pandemics in the last 102 years is equivalent to the number during the previous 2000 years.

Of course, there are caveats. Data is more accessible. Surveillance is better. And we can detect smaller outbreaks with modern tools, including social media. But the trend is evident - especially when we consider that half the outbreaks that have occurred since 1900 were in the last 20 years. Even as the world is still coming to terms with the global human and economic devastation that COVID-19 has wrought, we can expect that the next pandemic is just around the corner with a disruptive force potentially as strong or stronger. Our beloved planet is simply not coping with her most dangerous infestation - humans.

As the modern digital lives of humans become more interconnected, populations are also growing and concentrating dangerously in large urban centers. Modern transportation and logistics provide a physical connectivity that parallels the virtual one. Yet, as the physical distance between humans narrows, our thirst for more space and natural resources leads us to encroach on new sparsely populated places, and exposure to previously unknown animals, plants, and microbes. This push accelerates the emergence and subsequent spread of novel infectious diseases.

In the last few months, we have seen images of Godzilla-like cruise ships floating the seas, refused entry to ports, while seriously ill passengers on-board died without the necessary medical attention. We have seen meat-processing plants shut down in the USA, because most of their lowly paid workers were infected. Here, in Singapore, the outbreaks in our foreign worker dormitories have increased almost twenty-fold the number of local infections in just two months. We do not need much imagination to wonder what will happen next in over-populated prisons, overcrowded slums and migrant detention centres around the world. These are just a few examples of highly inflammable situations, which require careful monitoring and proactive regional and global policy alignment to diffuse and mitigate.

On the economic side, COVID-19 could end up costing the world close to 10 trillion dollars with millions of unemployed and furloughed workers. Even after COVID-19 passes, the recovery will be slow. A new way of doing business is likely to emerge, which relies less on labor, creating another long-term employment challenge. Simply stated, we are learning that pandemics are one of the most dangerous threats to our modern congested interdependent

world. It is imperative that we finally learn how to manage them. The world has had over 2000 years of practice and we still have not got it right.

COVID-19 must be our wake-up call. To be effective, our leaders must act collectively and swiftly. The message is clear: no matter how effective local public health authorities are, we need to respond globally in a deliberate, organized and complementary manner, and in the true spirit of international solidarity. Pandemic preparedness plans must be constantly ready and coordinated globally. But before even this current crisis subsides, we must start identifying the best and worst public health responses, while accounting for differences of cultures and political models. There will be ample data for academics and policy makers to sift through. It is a golden opportunity and we must seize it this time around. The world has forgotten too many past threats. We cannot forget again.

Like many international organizations, the World Health Organization (WHO) has had a checkered history. But then, the WHO was never given the necessary mandate and resources to achieve its mission. Yet, with all its limitations and challenges, the WHO has the technical mandate, convening power and political legitimacy to lead a pandemic preparedness agenda. WHO has to get on its side the global leaders who are supportive while garnering support from other multilateral agencies. Its agenda should be based on achieving the goal of health equity - not just among low- and low-middle-income countries and their diaspora, but also among disenfranchised communities in rich countries, in dealing with and responding to pandemics. At a higher level, it is about strengthening health systems holistically to achieve universal health care and pandemic preparedness. No one is safe until everyone is safe. The COVID-19 crisis presents an opportunity to reform global governance on pandemic response, to make it more efficient, inclusive and equitable.

This is the time for leaders around the planet to work together to help the world become pandemic-ready and pandemic-resistant. This is a planetary problem that involves humans, animals, plants, microbes, agriculture, business, science, technology, ecology, and the economy. The global community must act collectively and decisively in a trans-disciplinary fashion. Like passengers on a stranded cruise ship, we are all in the same boat and cannot disembark. Our only hope is to come out of our individual cabins and work together to keep afloat. Two thousand years of outbreaks and pandemics. Can we finally learn?

Yap-Seng Chong is Professor and Dean of the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine

Tikki Pangestu is Visiting Professor at the NUS Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy

Swaine Chen is an Associate Professor at the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, and Group Leader, Infectious Diseases, Genome Institute of Singapore, A*STAR

International

Trump strips Hong Kong privileges, curbs students in volley on China

Beijing's bid to exert control in Hong Kong stokes anger

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump said Friday he would strip several of Hong Kong's special privileges with the United States and bar some Chinese students from US universities in anger over Beijing's bid to exert control in the financial hub. In a day of concerted action, the United States and Britain also raised alarm at the UN Security Council over a controversial new security law for Hong Kong, infuriating Beijing which said the issue had no place at the world body.

In a White House appearance that Trump had teased for a day, the US president attacked China over its treatment of the former British colony, saying it was "diminishing the city's long-standing and proud status." "This is a tragedy for the people of Hong Kong, the people of China and indeed the people of the world," Trump said. Trump also said he was terminating the US relationship with the World Health Organization, which he has accused of pro-China bias in its management of the coronavirus crisis. But Trump was light on specifics and notably avoided personal criticism of President Xi Jinping, with whom he has boasted of having a friendship even as the two powers feud over an increasing range of issues.

"I am directing my administration to begin the process of eliminating policy that gives Hong Kong different and special treatment," Trump said. "This will affect the full range of agreements, from our extradition treaty to our export controls on dual-use technologies and more, with few exceptions," he said. Secretary of

State Mike Pompeo on Wednesday informed Congress that the Trump administration would no longer consider Hong Kong to be separate under US law, but it was up to Trump to spell out the consequences. China this week pressed ahead on a law that would ban subversion and other perceived offenses against its rule in Hong Kong, which was rocked by months of massive pro-democracy protests last year.

US restricts students

In a move that could have long-reaching consequences, Trump issued an order to ban graduate students from US universities who are connected to China's military. "For years, the government of China has conducted illicit espionage to steal our industrial secrets, of which there are many," Trump said. Hawkish Republicans have been clamoring to kick out Chinese students enrolled in sensitive fields. The FBI in February said it was investigating 1,000 cases of Chinese economic espionage and technological theft.

But any move to deter students is unwelcome for US universities, which rely increasingly on tuition from foreigners and have already been hit hard by the COVID-19 shutdown. China has been the top source of foreign students to the United States for the past decade with nearly 370,000 Chinese at US universities, although Trump's order will not directly affect undergraduates. Critics say Trump has been eager to fan outrage about China to deflect attention from his own



HONG KONG: Pedestrians cross a road in Hong Kong. The United States and Britain have defied China's anger by raising Hong Kong's autonomy at the UN Security Council as President Donald Trump prepared new measures against Beijing. — AFP

handling of the pandemic that has killed more than 100,000 people in the United States, the highest death toll of any country. Chuck Schumer, the top Democrat in the Senate, called Trump's announcement "just pathetic."

Eliot Engel, a Democrat who heads the House Foreign Affairs Committee, noted that Trump treaded lightly on Hong Kong during last year's protests as he sought a trade deal with Xi. "Now, the president wants

to shift the blame for his failures onto China, so he's doing the right thing for the wrong reason," Engel said. Trump's order could also trigger retaliation. China in March expelled US journalists after the Trump administration tightened visa rules for staff at Chinese state media. "Sanctions are not always unilateral and our country (China) has said that we will roll out countermeasures," Hong Kong's security chief John Lee said Saturday. — AFP

Ethiopian forces 'execute dozens'

ADDIS ABABA: Ethiopian soldiers and police officers allegedly carried out dozens of extrajudicial executions last year in a crackdown on a rebel group active in the country's restive Oromia region, Amnesty International said in a report Friday. The alleged killings - 39 in total - are part of a pattern of abuses that also include torture and mass arbitrary arrests, with detainees subjected to "political rehabilitation training" promoting Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's government, the report said. The abuses highlight how Ethiopian security forces continue "to crush dissent and political opposition" under Abiy, winner of last year's Nobel Peace Prize, Amnesty researcher Fisseha Tekle told AFP. They risk aggravating political tensions ahead of general elections that were scheduled for August but have been delayed because of the coronavirus pandemic, Fisseha said.

"What is really happening is beyond a normal law enforcement mandate," he said. "They are going after people who are perceived to be supporters of the opposition as well as the families of militants." A relative of one slain man described hearing the gunshot that likely killed him but told Amnesty "I couldn't go and check since there was a curfew." "The next morning, we found his body near the military camp," the relative said. "His body had clear marks of physical abuse, as his hands and leg

were broken." The crackdown in Oromia is ostensibly targeting the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), blamed for a spate of assassinations, bombings, bank robberies and kidnappings in Oromia.

The OLA, believed to number in the low thousands, broke off from the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), an opposition party that spent years in exile but was allowed to return to Ethiopia after Abiy took office in 2018. The Amnesty report largely concerns abuses committed in the East and West Guji zones, in southern Oromia. In February AFP reported on how the campaign against the OLA was playing out in an area of western Ethiopia known as Wollega, also in Oromia. Residents there told of extrajudicial killings and mass arrests unfolding amid a months-long internet blackout that was only lifted after Ethiopia recorded its first case of COVID-19 in mid-March.

Amnesty's report also claims security forces' "complicity" in intercommunal violence in the northern Amhara region, either through active involvement or a failure to intervene to protect vulnerable communities there. When contacted by AFP, Abiy's office referred questions to Ethiopia's Ministry of Peace, which did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Amnesty notes in its report that various ministries and government bodies did not respond to multiple requests for comment on its findings in Oromia. An official in Amhara rejected Amnesty's findings and claimed that security forces' responses in that region limited the number of casualties, the report said. — AFP

Bathhouses awash with post-lockdown customers

YOKOHAMA: Masazumi Kato sighed deeply as he lowered himself into a tub at a public bathhouse in a Tokyo suburb, enjoying a return to a Japanese tradition largely off-limits during the city's coronavirus lockdown. With the lifting of a nationwide state of emergency over the virus, Japan's onsen - large bathhouses where patrons bathe naked in a series of warm pools and tubs - are gradually reopening.

And fans like 52-year-old Kato have few qualms about returning. "I believe they are taking anti-virus measures, like chlorine," he told AFP as he soaked in an outdoor tub, with other naked men submerged in pools nearby. "I trust them and I like to use this place," said Kato, a frequent patron of the Yumominosato facility in Yokohama, outside Tokyo. The five-storey bathhouse is typical of the hugely popular onsen that dot the country. It hosts a range of indoor and outdoor pools, usually with spring water and sometimes equipped with jets to massage pressure points or mineral-rich water said to offer health benefits.

The facility is also home to a restaurant, massage rooms, a comic book library and various relaxation rooms. For many Japanese an onsen trip is a day-long experience, with bathing punctuated by naps, massages and lunch. But most large onsen shut their doors when the government declared a state of emergency in April, initially in Tokyo and a few other regions but the closures eventually expanded nationwide. The government designated smaller bathhouses called sento - which in the past often catered to people with no bath at home - as essential businesses, allowing them to remain open. They were asked to increase ventilation in closed areas, maintain distance between customers and wipe down areas that people touch, including lockers and door knobs.

But Yumominosato was closed for around two months, and is now hoping it can convince customers it is safe to return. Kato said he was not worried about the virus, despite the enclosed indoor spaces and impossibility of wearing a mask while in hot tubs. "We already know how it transmits from a person to person and from objects to people. So you don't go out and touch everything in your sight," he said. "I think individually I am taking the necessary measures." Japanese infection experts have not specifically discouraged the use of public baths, though they have stressed that patrons should observe good hygiene practices and social distancing. — AFP

Love at first sight: COVID accelerates courtship, wedding

ALEXANDRIA: "You can take off your mask and kiss the bride," the priest said, as a septuagenarian US couple who spent the pandemic lockdown together after a single date married on Thursday. "In normal circumstances, we would still be dating," said Linda Delk, 72, her hand clutching that of her husband Ardell Hoveskeland, 78. But the novel coronavirus forced them to shift into high gear while their relationship was still in its infancy. The couple, both of whom were still grieving the loss of a spouse in 2019, met for the first time in late February at the Peace Lutheran Church in Alexandria, near Washington.

"We met on pancake Tuesday (Shrove Tuesday) at the church," said Delk. "He greeted me, I liked him, we helped clean up together afterward." The next week, at another church event, "we were at the same table, we had a chance to talk some more," said Hoveskeland, a former urban transportation engineer. They agreed to meet for lunch. "We got out to a lunch one time. It's the single date we have had," said Hoveskeland. Two days later local authorities called for residents to stay at home to help stop the spread of the deadly COVID-19 virus.

Given their age, the two lovebirds never imagined that they would be breaking the rules. "Both of us realized - 'I need a partner'" said Hoveskeland. Without thinking twice, she moved in with him. "It seems the most natural thing in the world," said Delk, a former program evaluator at Gallaudet University. It was



KIEV: A woman wearing a protective face mask and gloves as she rests near a flowerbed 'I love' in the center of Kiev, as Ukraine eases anti-virus restrictions imposed to curb the spread of the COVID-19 outbreak. — AFP

a risky move, but "none of us wanted to be alone," said Hoveskeland. "On a lot of levels we felt we connected," he said.

'Most foolish thing'

While at church during a religious service the couple was seized by the same rush of emotion. "I said: did you just asked me to marry you?" said Hoveskeland, without really remembering who took the first step. "We immediately went to a jewelry store to order rings - we got them on the last day before the shop closed completely," he said. On Thursday, clad in their Sunday best, the couple exchanged rings with friends and relatives observing the ceremony online via Zoom. A friend in Australia even rose in the middle of

the night to be virtually present for the event.

"In the best Christian tradition ... you are doing the most foolish thing," joked Sarah Scherschligt, the priest who married the couple, wiping a tear away that rolled over her face mask. "In September I buried Ardell's wife," Pastor Scherschligt later told AFP, as a way of explaining her sudden burst of emotion. Back in February Scherschligt advised Ardell to talk to Linda. "All pastors play match-maker, we want our people to be happy," she said. But she did not imagine that they would join in matrimony so quickly. "They get to know each other faster but narrower," she said, noting that, for example, Linda never met Ardell's daughter. "They still have a lot to discover," she said. — AFP

Mediterranean sorrow as virus upends rituals

MARSEILLE: To greet friends and acquaintances by kissing, hugging and shaking hands is considered part of the essence of Mediterranean identity. But the coronavirus pandemic has put an abrupt end to such rituals with no indication of when it will be safe to resume them. Fear of spreading the virus has upended traditions as close physical contact suddenly became dangerous, even life-threatening. Fisherman Daniel Reggio used to hail friends and colleagues with the traditional "bise" or cheek-kissing when he bumped into them in the southern French port city of Marseille.

Since the spread of COVID-19, he has resorted to elbow-bumping. "We can't say we don't miss it, but going without isn't going to end friendship or complicity," said Reggio, as he sold sea bream in Marseille's historic Old Port area. Pensioner Yvon Tapias organises walking tours in Marseille. He now greets people with the "Wuhan shake", a foot greeting that harks back to the Chinese city where the novel coronavirus first appeared. "We touch each other with our soles," he said, pointing to the inside of his foot. "People from the south need contact," Tapias said. In Tunisia, actor Mohamed Werdeni said the physical greetings were part of regional traditions. "We like to



BEIRUT: People gather by the Mediterranean sea of the Lebanese capital Beirut amid coronavirus restrictions in the country. — AFP

kiss each other two, three, four times, depending on the region. It's very weird to say hello like this now."

'Gut-wrenching'

Even men normally greet each other with the "bise" in Marseille. "It's where I first kissed executives. I had never had the idea of kissing a banker before!" said the director of Marseille's acclaimed Museum of Civilizations of Europe and the Mediterranean, Jean-Francois Chougnat, who arrived from Paris a few years ago. Further west along the Mediterranean coast, people from Montpellier are even greater fans of

the bise. Each greeting leads to three enthusiastic cheek kisses. "We really miss it. It's gut-wrenching every time we have to stop ourselves," student Melodie Ricaud said, adding that she now hesitates between a distant hand gesture and the Indian greeting "namaste" where both hands are brought together in front of the chest. Fatima Boulamaat, from Montpellier's working-class area "Petit Bard", no longer greets her friends with physical contact. "I do the sign that my Moroccan grandmother did, with the right hand on the heart and an intense gaze so that they feel my affection," she said. — AFP

Business

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10 UK pushing US to form 5G club of nations to cut out Huawei



10 India quarterly growth worst in two decades



11 Badly hit California economy aims to reverse 'free fall'



WASHINGTON, DC: US President Donald Trump speaks during a meeting with industry executives on the reopening of the US economy in the State Dining Room on Friday in Washington, DC. — AFP

COVID widening inequality in US: Fed

US consumer spending sinks while savings soar

WASHINGTON: The coronavirus pandemic could widen inequalities in the United States, Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell warned as government data showed consumer spending plunging by a record amount.

The world's largest economy is in dire shape with more than 40 million layoffs since lockdowns were imposed in mid-March to stop the spread of COVID-19. And with low-wage services workers bearing the brunt of the job losses, Powell warned the pandemic could be "a great increaser of inequality."

"The pandemic is falling on those least able to bear its burdens," he said in a videoconference. The Fed has rolled out trillions of dollars in liquidity to support industries walloped by the downturn, and Powell reiterated that supporting employment was the central bank's main goal.

"Everything we do is focused on creating an environment in which those people will have their best chance to keep their job, or get a new job, or maybe go back to their old job if they've been furloughed," he said. The unemployment rate skyrocketed from near-historic lows just before the pandemic hit to 14.7 percent in April, and Commerce Department data released Friday showed personal consumption plunging by a record 13.6 percent in the first full month of nationwide lockdowns.

Together with news that monthly exports collapsed, the report left economists anticipating the largest con-



Goods trade deficit rises 7.2% in April

traction in gross domestic product in the second quarter since the Great Depression. Data has also been dismal this month on the labor market, manufacturing production and homebuilding.

"Right now, the economy is totally dependent upon the largesse of the government," said Joel Naroff, chief economist at Naroff Economics in Holland, Pennsylvania. "Will the federal government keep sending out checks or will the household and business welfare payments dry up?"

The Commerce Department said consumer spending, which accounts for more than two-thirds of US economic activity, plunged 13.6 percent last month, the biggest drop since the government started tracking the series in 1959. It eclipsed the previous all-time decrease of 6.9 percent in March.

out of 48,000 in France, and more than 10,000 in the rest of the world—some eight percent of the company's global workforce. It would entail retraining, internal mobility and voluntary departures, spread out over three years, with no outright dismissals envisioned for now. Expansion plans in Morocco and Romania have been halted, and are under review in Russia.

'We don't understand'

Four production sites in France could be closed or restructured, the automaker said, and its hulking factory at Flins northwest of Paris will stop making the Zoe electric hatchback from 2024. Overall, production capacity will be cut to 3.3 million by 2024 from four million vehicles currently.

The news came as a bombshell in Choisy, south of Paris, where about a hundred workers and local representatives gathered at a Renault plant Friday morning. It employs some 260 people and is alone among 14 French production sites earmarked for closure by 2022, according to chairman Jean-Dominique Senard. Its activities will move to Flins.

"It's a shock... We don't understand how it's possible," said Antonio Perez, 52, who has worked at the Choisy site for over 20 years. Added his colleague Farid, 43: "Now we know, we know that we have no future... They just drop us in the middle of a pandemic, they throw us out on the street."

Future 'likely to be harsh'

The mayor of Choisy, Didier Guillaume, also expressed concerns, insisting the site remains viable and is the second-largest private employer of the city. "The future is likely to be harsh," he said. Workers at a Renault factory in Maubeuge in northern France downed tools,

Economists polled by Reuters had forecast consumer spending would plummet 12.6 percent in April. Spending was depressed by a decrease in outlays on healthcare as dental offices closed and hospitals postponed elective surgeries and non-emergency visits to focus on patients suffering from COVID-19.

Prices also dropped by 0.5 percent, the biggest drop in more than five years, according to the monthly personal income and outlays report, as the mass layoffs slowed consumption.

Rising pessimism

A separate survey showed consumers are becoming more pessimistic about the prospects for the post-pandemic recovery, yet another indicator of economic damage in addition to the more than 100,000 deaths from the coronavirus. "Household spending will likely continue to be impacted going forward by a more cautious attitude by consumers as job losses continue to mount," Rubeeela Farooqi of High Frequency Economics said.

"However, we think April likely marked the bottom and activity could be less weak in May and June." Fueling the \$1.89 trillion drop in consumption were decreases in spending on food and accommodation as people stopped traveling and going out. And that drop sent the personal savings rate soaring by 33 percent with shoppers holding on to \$6.15 trillion—money that

could perhaps be unleashed to aid the economy's recovery or stashed for hard times ahead.

Income took an incongruent turn, shooting up by 10.5 percent in April, but that spike was caused by the government's massive \$2.2 trillion CARES Act which boosted unemployment benefits and included direct payments to all Americans, including children.

When those payments are excluded along with other government social benefits, income actually fell 6.3 percent, which Harvard University economist Jason Furman said would be the largest decline ever. And he warned on Twitter that if Congress fails to extend the expanded unemployment payments beyond their expiration in the coming weeks, "these numbers will turn ugly in August."

The University of Michigan's consumer sentiment index was practically flat in May, according to the survey released Friday, ticking up only half a point as consumers held back their buying. But the index measuring future conditions plunged six points to 65.9, according to the report.

The CARES Act has "helped to stem economic hardship, but those programs have not acted to stimulate discretionary spending due to uncertainty about the future course of the pandemic," the survey's chief economist Richard Curtin said. Consumers were, however, expecting the economy to improve in the coming months, Curtin said. — Agencies

Renault to cut 15,000 jobs in cost-cutting

PARIS: Carmaker Renault said Friday that it would cut nearly 15,000 jobs, including 4,600 at its core French operations, as it seeks to steer out of a cash crunch exacerbated by the coronavirus crisis.

The company will target savings of more than two billion euros (\$2.2 billion) over three years and turn its focus to electric vehicles as it seeks to restore competitiveness in a market reeling from slumping sales since the COVID-19 pandemic forced millions of people into home confinement for weeks on end. Renault had been navigating turbulent waters even before the health crisis, starting with the shock arrest of its former boss Carlos Ghosn on financial misconduct charges in 2018 which led to deep rifts in its alliance with Japanese partners Nissan and Mitsubishi.

"The difficulties encountered by the group, the major crisis facing the automotive industry and the urgency of the ecological transition are all imperatives that are driving the company to accelerate its transformation," Renault said in a statement. In February, the company unveiled its first annual loss in a decade, followed quickly by the 2020 health crisis that saw new car registrations in the European Union plunge 76.3 percent year-on-year in April.

In an "adjustment" plan announced to unions Thursday, Renault said nearly 4,600 jobs would be cut



PARIS: French leftist party La France Insoumise's local MP Mathilde Panot (center) speaks with unionists outside French carmaker Renault's plant of Choisy-le-Roi, near Paris, on Friday after the group announced nearly 15,000 job losses worldwide, including 4600 in France in a two-billion-euro cost-cutting plan over three years. — AFP

while the CGT labor union called the new plan "suicidal."

Under the new plan, Maubeuge-based production of electric Kangoo utility vehicles is set to move to Douai, 70 kilometers (43 miles) away, much to the consternation of workers. Renault's shares fell back 7.5 percent on the Paris stock market Friday after surging more than 17 percent Wednesday, when Renault and its partners Nissan and Mitsubishi unveiled a plan to deepen an alliance that just months ago appeared on the verge of breaking up.

On Tuesday, while announcing an eight-billion-euro rescue plan for France's car industry—which has seen sales and revenue slashed by some 80 percent—

President Emmanuel Macron said he wanted no production of any car model made in France to move elsewhere.

Macron's plan is heavily focused on bolstering France's electric car industry, and he said Renault had agreed to join a Franco-German project to produce electric batteries. This had been a condition for Renault to receive a five-billion-euro government rescue loan, along with guarantees from the company over the future of staff. The French government holds a 15 percent stake in Renault. The previous day, Nissan reported a \$6.2 billion annual net loss and said it would shut its Barcelona plant and slash production. — AFP

Business

UK pushing US to form 5G club of nations to cut out Huawei

Issue to feature at G7 summit next month

LONDON: Britain said Friday it was pushing the United States to form a club of 10 nations that could develop its own 5G technology and reduce dependence on China's controversial telecoms giant Huawei.

The issue is expected to feature at a G7 summit that US President Donald Trump will host next month against the backdrop of a fierce confrontation with China that has been exacerbated by a global blame game over the spread of the novel coronavirus. Britain has allowed the Chinese global leader in 5G technology to build up to 35 percent of the infrastructure necessary to roll out its new speedy data network.

But Prime Minister Boris Johnson was reported by The Daily Telegraph last week to have instructed officials to draw up plans to cut Huawei out of the network by 2023 as relations with China sour. The Times newspaper said Britain is proposing a "DIO" club of democratic partners that groups the G7 nations with Australia and the Asian technology leaders South Korea and India.

It said one of the options involves channeling investments into existing telecommunication companies within the 10 member states. A Downing Street spokesman confirmed that Britain is reaching out to partners in search for an alternative to Huawei.

"We (are) seeking new entrants into the market in order to diversify and that is something we've been speaking with our allies about, including the United States," the Downing Street spokesman said.

Few options

Finland's Nokia and Sweden's Ericsson are Europe's only current alternative options for supplying 5G equipment such as antennas and relay masts. "We need new entrants to the market," a UK government source told The Times.

"That was the reason we ended up having to go along with Huawei at the time," Johnson's decision to include Huawei angered Washington because it believes that the private Chinese company can either spy on Western

communications or simply shut down the UK network under orders from Beijing.

The United States has imposed several rounds of sanctions on Huawei that have put the future of Britain's 5G rollout in peril. Downing Street said the UK National Cyber Security Centre was studying the implication of the US sanctions on Huawei's immediate ability to produce the equipment Britain needs.

Pressure on Johnson to cut ties with Huawei is being compounded by the new security law Beijing



VANCOUVER: Chinese Huawei tech executive Meng Wanzhou leaves her Vancouver home on Thursday to appear in British Columbia Supreme Court. Meng Wanzhou was dealt a legal setback when a Canadian judge ruled that proceedings to extradite her to the US will go ahead. — AFP

plans to impose on the once British-held Hong Kong. London has infuriated Beijing by saying it would offer almost three million Hong Kong residents UK visa rights and a pathway to future citizenship if the new law goes into effect.

But Johnson's reported plan to completely remove Huawei from the UK network could prove costly at a time when his government is seeking new trade part-

ners following Britain's exit from the EU. It is also proving difficult to implement because private UK firms are pushing for the technology in order to stay competitive in a tight market.

Britain's BT said this month it was abandoning plans to strip out Huawei from the most sensitive part of its networks by the end of the year because the government's own deadline was set at 2023. — AFP



Britain wants new entrants into 5G domain

communications or simply shut down the UK network under orders from Beijing.

The United States has imposed several rounds of sanctions on Huawei that have put the future of Britain's 5G rollout in peril. Downing Street said the UK National Cyber Security Centre was studying the implication of the US sanctions on Huawei's immediate ability to produce the equipment Britain needs.

Pressure on Johnson to cut ties with Huawei is being compounded by the new security law Beijing

India quarterly growth worst in two decades

MUMBAI: India's economy grew at its slowest pace in at least two decades last quarter, government data showed Friday, with warnings of far worse to come as it grapples with the fallout of the world's largest coronavirus lockdown. Asia's third-largest economy expanded by just 3.1 percent in the January-March period, which coincided with the first week of a month-long shutdown.

The figures beat even gloomier forecasts, with Bloomberg News predicting growth would slow to just 1.6 percent, but analysts are bracing for a severe contraction in the current quarter after manufacturing, services and consumer spending came to a grinding halt. Annual growth was 4.2 percent, its slowest pace since the 2008 global financial crisis, though the finance ministry said the estimates were likely to be revised due to a lack of available data.

The shutdown is widely expected to plunge the country into recession, with Goldman Sachs predicting a 45 percent contraction in the April-June quarter from the previous year. The central bank has also warned of a downturn and slashed rates to spur lending.

Even before Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a shutdown in late March, the economy was struggling to gain traction with sluggish growth, record unemployment and a flurry of bad loans making banks reluctant to lend. Earlier this month Modi announced a \$266 billion package — 10 percent of the country's GDP — to revive the battered economy.



NEW DELHI: Laborers work at the side of an under construction flyover after the government eased a nationwide lockdown as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 coronavirus, in New Delhi yesterday. — AFP

But with millions of migrant workers having fled home to their villages due to a lack of food and money, and factories struggling with labor shortages, few expect economic activity to pick up soon.

The key services sector—which contributes 54 percent of GDP—suffered a severe blow last month, with the purchasing managers index of activity experiencing its sharpest contraction since record-keeping began in 2005. Top IT firms including TCS, Infosys and Wipro also reported weak earnings in the quarter as the pandemic dragged on demand from Western markets.

'30-40% contraction'

Analysts warned India to brace for an even bigger hit in the coming months as the extent of the pandemic's toll on the economy becomes clear. "The June-ended quarter will be terrible and we can expect at least a 30-40 percent contraction," said Ashutosh Datar, an independent economist based in Mumbai.

In more bad news for Modi's government, 122 million Indians lost their jobs last month, according to data from the Mumbai-based Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy think-tank, with small traders and daily wage earners accounting for the bulk of losses.

"Frankly, India should be growing at seven or eight percent to create jobs for everyone, so we are headed (for) a bigger jobs crisis," Datar told AFP. Modi's government in March announced an economic welfare package of \$22 billion to provide the country's poorest citizens with direct cash transfers and food subsidies for three months to cope with the fallout of the lockdown. But analysts say the road to recovery will be rocky, with New Delhi on Friday also revising growth figures for the quarter ending December from 4.7 percent to 4.1 percent. The revised figures reflect "a slowdown in consumption, exports... (and) vehicle sales", said Sameer Narang, economist at State Bank of Baroda. — AFP

Egyptian urges WTO to pick African as chief

GENEVA: As the World Trade Organization prepares to search for a new director-general, it should commit to finally handing the top job to an African, a candidate for the post said. Hamid Mamdouh, a former Egyptian diplomat, told AFP in an interview this week that African countries were determined to take the reins of the organization for the first time.

"The African Union decided back in July 2019 that the next director-general of the WTO should be from Africa," he said. "It's a strong sentiment," said the 67-year-old, who spent more than 20 years in high-level WTO posts.

"Africa never held that position before and it's time, because all other regions have occupied that position."

Single African candidate?

Mamdouh, who also holds Swiss citizenship after living in the country for 35 years, is not the only African expected to bid for the job. Nigerian Yonov Frederick Agah, a WTO deputy director-general, and Eloi Laourou, Benin's ambassador to the UN in Geneva, were also preselected by the African Union in February for consideration. The AU had been aiming to whittle the choice down to a single African candidate by July, well ahead of the initially scheduled kick-off date for a months-long election process in December.

But earlier this month, the WTO's current chief, Roberto Azevedo of



GENEVA: Candidate for the Director General of the World Trade Organization, Hamid Mamdouh gestures in front of the WTO headquarters on Friday in Geneva during an interview with AFP. — AFP

Brazil, suddenly announced his "personal decision" to step down on August 31 — a full year before his mandate expires.

The surprise announcement forced the global trade body to accelerate the nomination process, with anyone wishing to replace him given from June 8 to July 8 to announce their candidacy. It remains to be seen if African countries will manage to rally around a single candidate by then. And reaching consensus could be further complicated if Amina Mohamed, a Kenyan politician and former diplomat who ran against Azevedo when he won his first term in 2013, joins the race, as some expect she will.

Whoever wins the top spot will have their work cut out for them, at a time when the coronavirus pandemic has pushed the global economy and international trade into turmoil, facing downturns not seen since the Great Depression. — AFP

Stocks drop as Trump warns of China response

LONDON: Global equities fell Friday as US President Donald Trump readied a response to Beijing's controversial planned national security law for Hong Kong, putting trading floors on edge.

Trump announced a news conference for Friday as heightened tensions between the two superpowers overshadowed optimism over signs that the global coronavirus crisis was easing. "Markets are rightly worrying about escalating tensions between the US and China," said Holger Schmieding, an analyst with Berenberg.

Trump might announce targeted sanctions against Beijing, he said. "This dispute is serious," Schmieding added. On Wall Street, the Dow Jones index was down around 180 points in the late New York morning.

European markets were also down at the closing bell as investors adopted "a more pessimistic tone, with fears over the impending US reaction to Chinese actions in Hong Kong driving traders to bank their profits ahead of the weekend," noted IG analyst Joshua Mahony.

Euro jumps

The European single currency briefly zoomed to a two-month peak as the dollar took a hit from souring China-US relations, before easing back somewhat. Trump told re-



TOKYO: A cyclist wearing a face mask rides past an electric quotation board displaying the morning numbers of the Nikkei 225 Index on the Tokyo Stock Exchange in Tokyo on Friday. — AFP

porters at an Oval Office meeting that he was "not happy" with Beijing and the news conference would be about "what we're doing with respect to China", while giving no specifics. The White House has already revoked the Hong Kong's special status, potentially opening the way for it to be stripped of key trading privileges such as lower tariffs than mainland China. Relations between Washington and Beijing have deteriorated since the outbreak of the virus, which has killed more than 100,000 Americans, with Trump laying the blame at China's door.

The row has fanned fears of a renewal of their trade war, which hammered the world economy and sent markets tumbling last year. Still, traders were drawing some support from parts of the world gradually returning to a

semblance of normality as coronavirus death and infection rates eased.

Renault hits skids

Renault was the biggest faller in Paris, with shares crashing by more than seven percent after the company revealed a radical restructuring plan to save two billion euros (\$2.2 billion) over three years. The French carmaker plans to axe almost 15,000 jobs, including 4,600 at core operations in France as it seeks to steer out of a cash crunch exacerbated by the coronavirus crisis.

The group is switching focus to electric vehicles in the hope of restoring competitiveness in a market reeling from slumping sales, after the COVID-19 pandemic forced millions of people into home confinement. — AFP

Italy in worst recession since WWII

MILAN: Facing its deepest recession since World War II and with business confidence collapsing, the coronavirus pandemic is hitting Italy's economy hard. Business confidence in the eurozone's third largest economy in May plummeted to its lowest level since official statistics institute ISTAT started the index in March 2005.

The figure is "alarming", said small business federation Confesercenti. "The health and economic emergency has swept businesses away, especially in shops, services and tourism," it said.

Its members are particularly concerned "by the lack of liquidity necessary to pay costs and salaries... we are close to a point of no return and that's why the measures decided by the government (loan guarantees, SME subsidies) must be operational immediately," said federation head Patrizia De Luise. "We need to reduce bureaucracy and accelerate and simplify procedures, because if support is delayed again, many businesses will have no option but to stop," she said.

The government last week accused banks of not acting quickly enough, but they said that they had already passed on around 400,000 loan requests worth more than 18 billion euros (\$20

billion) to the state-backed Central Guarantee Fund. A million jobs threatened. Italy was the first European country to be hit by the pandemic and imposed a strict two-month lockdown which paralysed much of the country's economic activity.

As a result, the country is set for a drop in GDP of between nine and 13 percent, the Bank of Italy said on Friday. Data also showed that the economy shrank 5.3 percent in the first quarter—worse than the 4.7 percent initially estimated.

It had not seen such an "exceptional" decline in the first quarter since 1995, ISTAT said.

This year's losses could amount to 170 billion euros, equivalent to the GDP of Veneto, Italy's third biggest industrial region, a Mediobanca study said. The head of the country's main business confederation Cofindustria, Carlo Bonomi, said that up to a million jobs could be threatened nationwide.

"We're waiting for figures at the end of May but indications are that between 700,000 and a million jobs are in danger," he said.

"Jobs are only created if there is growth, innovation, investment. The car manufacturing crisis can't be solved with subsidies or furloughing. You solve it by looking to the future, by investing in new technologies," he said. Italy is set to be the main beneficiary of a European Union 750-billion-euro recovery plan but it still may not be enough. — AFP

Business

Badly hit California economy aims to reverse 'free fall'

Unemployment shot to 24% under lockdown

LOS ANGELES: Millions unemployed, world-famous tourist attractions closed, movie sets shuttered and a huge deficit looming: California has been among the states hardest hit by the pandemic economically. Before the coronavirus struck, the Golden State had been growing at a faster pace than the rest of the country for an entire decade.

But when stay-at-home orders were announced in March, earlier than similar measures elsewhere across

revenue shortfalls," Governor Gavin Newsom said two weeks ago. Lockdown restrictions are now starting to ease, with some 70 percent of the state's \$3 trillion economy allowed to resume operations under strict social distancing measures, according to the governor. Still, business remains chronically low and may remain so as long as consumers lack confidence that the virus is under control, said Tom Steyer, the former presidential candidate who heads California's economy recovery commission. "For this economy to work... people need to feel safe," he said in a radio interview.

"You're not going to go shopping if you don't think it's safe. You're not going to go to work if you don't think it's safe."

Technology

But experts believe the state's diverse economy—the world's fifth-largest—can still bounce back to lead the United States' recovery. With an economy larger than Great Britain's, California represents 14.5 percent of the entire nation's GDP.

The state of 40 million people contains international tech powerhouse Silicon Valley, as well as Hollywood's sprawling entertainment industry. The hi-tech sector provides reasons for optimism, according to Jerry Nickelsburg, economics professor at University of California Los Angeles, who predicts future manufacturing will favor "locations where there is a concentration of engineers and scientists." California's "very strong and vibrant tech sector" is expected to "grow and to lead us out of recession," he added.

"That means California, especially in the high income sectors, will be growing more rapidly than the (rest of the) US." But not everyone is so bullish. Steyer has warned the technology sector may not be enough to compensate for "free fall" in other parts of the econ-



SANTA MONICA: In this file photo, a sign reminds the public of social distancing rules but most businesses remain closed along the Third Street Promenade shopping street in Santa Monica, California as some retailers across the state have been allowed to reopen yesterday. — AFP

omy, according to the New York Times.

These include massive lost agricultural harvests, empty hotels and wine tasting rooms, and venues from sport stadiums to concert halls like the Hollywood Bowl canceling their entire summer programs.

California's oil-producing cities have also been crippled by the collapse in global oil prices.

And Los Angeles's massive ports have seen a 15 percent drop in volume this year, driven by the China trade war as well as pandemic measures. "California

has been and will be a key component of the world economy," said Stephen Cheung, former global trade director at the Port of Los Angeles. "Many folks will look carefully... because there are so many different microcosms here that represent the world."

"We're not going back to January of 2020," added Steyer. "We want to have a more sustainable, a more forward-looking California so that we go through this very, very difficult and painful time and come out with something better." — AFP



14.5% of US GDP from California

the nation, the economy—heavily dependent on tourism, hospitality and entertainment—took a sharp nosedive. As businesses from shops and restaurants to amusement parks such as Disneyland closed, unemployment shot from negligible levels to 24 percent, well above the national rate of 15 percent and closer to the state's Great Depression peak.

Having paid out nearly \$19 billion in unemployment benefits, with the assistance of federal loans, California now faces a \$54 billion deficit. That means cuts to school, social, health and infrastructure programs.

"COVID-19 has caused California and economies across the country to confront a steep and unprecedented economic crisis—facing massive job losses and

S&P Global Platts' Analytics Oil Update

Key points on the global oil market

By Chris Midgley

Today's price reflect optimism in the market, but further upside above \$40/bbl this year will most likely be limited due to higher oil stocks and logistics constraints in US supply leading to some discounting.

Around the world, over \$100 billion of capex has been cut. In the US, rig count is down by 65 percent and frack crews are down by 85 percent, highlighting much lower activity. OPEC+ has plenty of spare capacity to put more oil onto market if prices recover further as they won't want to stimulate an early US shale rebound. With Oil around \$30-35/bbl, US shale remains under pressure and we expect further bankruptcy filings as smaller companies struggle to service debt.

Demand is partially recovering, as people return to cars, but other areas such as aviation (jet) will see much longer u-shaped recoveries. The likely drag on the global economy will result in 2021 oil demand being over 900,000 b/d below 2019 levels, effectively representing a two-year loss of oil demand growth amounting to 3-4 million b/d compared to pre-COVID19 forecasts.

Outlook for global oil supply

A steady flow of statements from around the world have taken announced oil supply shut ins to over 5 million b/d, topped by the US, Canada, and Kazakhstan. Add to that indications of surprisingly strong compliance from Russia, Iraq, and Nigeria and over-compliance by Saudi Arabia (by 1 million b/d) as well as UAE and Kuwait (80-100 thousand b/d each), we count more than 14 million b/d of shut ins or production cuts across non-OPEC and OPEC+ explicitly announced.

We estimate global oil supply is on course to drop by 13 million b/d from April levels to June. There is also supply that is coming down without explicit announcements. Plus supply will be on a declining path through 2021/2022 on falling rigs and lower spending.

This puts global oil supply securely on our forecasted path without extraordinary curtailments. They are enough to keep global oil supply within bounds of storage tank tops and balanced with demand that remains weak for May. We are not overly bullish as much anxiety persists, particularly around demand and the impact of opening up from lockdowns on the infection rate. Later in the Fall, there is the potential impact of a second wave of Covid-19 infections that could reverse oil demand improvements expected in coming months just as bloated stocks start to draw. Nevertheless, the current supply losses, OPEC's determination, and trend towards opening up point to stronger oil prices than we believed earlier.

Outlook for global oil demand

With the gradual reopening in the US and Europe, global demand in May is estimated to have jumped by 3.6 million b/d over April, led by a "V" shape recovery of gasoline demand. The month-on-month demand will further improve in June. On a year-on-year basis, however, the demand drop stays deep at over 17 million b/d year on year for 2Q20. Virus spreading in Emerging Markets still present and risk of a second wave of Covid-19 hit around the world cannot be ruled out.

Demand is now forecast to contract by 8.4 million b/d in 2020 with the worst being in April where the year on year decline was over 20 million b/d. 2021 demand will largely normalize with a 7.5 million b/d year-on-year growth but stay notably below 2019 levels by more than 900,000 b/d, as aviation and global trade struggle.

Asia has also been hit hard by the economic slump despite the opportunity to be first in line to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic among all major regions around the world. India in particular saw the worst year on year demand destruction in history last month, bringing Asia's April demand down by 5 million b/d year on year before it improves in May. Demand for the whole year is likely to be 1.9 million b/d below that of 2019.

Outlook for refining and product markets

Global refinery runs are still severely depressed, down roughly 13 million b/d year-on-year due to the severe demand contraction seen over the last couple of months. But with oil demand starting to turn higher, refinery runs are also expected to improve. We should see significant sequential increases beginning in June and over the summer months, tracking

demand recovery higher.

Product stocks are high and still building. Refiners are shifting yields, mostly away from jet, but also back and forth between gasoline and diesel driven by shifting price spreads as they try to more closely match production with rapidly changing demand. Currently, diesel and gasoline cracks are weak and roughly the same — sharing the pain of weak demand across the product barrel.

Overall, refinery margins will remain quite soft even after demand starts to recover as capacity is more than ample (demand is still down year-on-year and new refineries are ramping up in Asia) and high product stock levels will need to be worked off.

Outlook for oil inventories and prices

Crude prices have rapidly improved driven by larger supply cutbacks than initially expected and the prospect for demand recovery as lockdowns ease.

It now seems likely that total oil stocks will stay below capacity limits (just) without additional constraints on production. Contango has eased and oil in ships (afloat and in-transit) has leveled off and will decline in the months ahead.

Although have reached the mid \$30's, further increases will be more challenging as stocks remain very high and would come back onto the market if contango continues to narrow.

Outlook for NGLs/Petchems

Global NGL supply to drop by 1.2 million b/d in June 2020 due to OPEC+ cuts, lower refinery runs and shut ins in North America. Middle East LPG supplies appear to be tight too, with Saudi Aramco cancelling or deferring 9 to 10 cargoes for June liftings. Naphtha production from key Asian countries is expected to be 6.3 million b/d, roughly flat with 2019. Naphtha prices are strengthening as motor gasoline demand slowly returns.

Res/comm demand and stockpiling appear to be slowing, providing less support for LPG prices. This softening in LPG prices is allowing the feedstock to become more competitive with naphtha in crackers around the world.

In 2020, ethylene crackers are expected to run at lower utilization rates than we have seen in several years, on the order of 85 percent due to demand loss and new capacity coming online. Aromatics units will also see low utilization rates as gasoline demand slowly returns and new plants start up. Note: Global Director of Analytics, S&P Global Platts



BPG Kuwait launches back to business toolkit

KUWAIT: As companies across Kuwait brace to resume operations again in the country following a strict lockdown, BPG Kuwait, an integrated communications firm that brings together specialist thinkers and creators, part of MENA-based BPG Group and the WPP network launched "Back to Business", a workplace-actions oriented website aimed at equipping businesses in Kuwait with literature and content that will prepare them in light of the COVID-19 situation.

Accessible for all for free, www.BPGBacktoBusiness.com, features a suite of behavioural guidelines for employers and employees alike that will educate them on practicing safe social distancing and hygiene measures. Companies will be able to download and use all material based on World Health Organization safety guidelines which includes posters, guidelines and videos in Arabic and English to circulate amongst employees prior to the anticipated reopening and delivery of key services.

Souheil Arabi, Chief Executive Officer of BPG Kuwait said, "The government and frontliners in the country have been relentless in their efforts to combat the spread of COVID-19 in the country. As we prepare to re-open the economy, the onus is on us to ensure that their efforts are complimented by best practices within the office space. Being in the business of communications, www.BPGBacktoBusiness is our way of supporting our government and local businesses alike in preparing for the new normal in a simple and effective way." To find out how you can prepare and safeguard your business and employees when offices resume operations based on governmental guidelines, visit www.BPGBacktoBusiness.com

BPG Kuwait is an integrated communications firm based in Kuwait since 1999, and in the region for over 30 years, and services industry leaders and world-class brands in Kuwait and across the GCC.

of 2020, the services sector, manufacturing and farming all suffered major declines, the statistics agency said.

Worst still to come

Brazil has emerged as a major coronavirus hotspot, with more than 26,000 dead and more than 400,000 cases of infection. Figures for the month of March suggest that the second quarter numbers will be catastrophic. Industrial production was down 9.1 percent compared to February, and the auto manufacturing sector declined a mind-boggling 99 percent. "In Brazil, the same thing happened as in other countries affected by the pandemic, with a decline in services aimed at families due to the closure of shops," according to IBGE analyst Rebeca Palis. "Durable goods, vehicles, clothing, beauty salons, gyms, housing, food suffered greatly with social isolation," she said. A poll of economists consulted by the business daily Valor said that in the second quarter, Brazil's economy will shrink by a staggering 11.1 percent.

Many state governors, including those of Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, ordered partial quarantines in mid-March in a bid to halt the spread of the pandemic.

Bolsonaro, who has pinned his hopes of re-election on a booming economy, has berated governors for imposing what he calls "the tyranny of total quarantine." His government has put in place programs to help the most vulnerable, including an allowance of 600 reais, around \$100, for the working poor dependent on the informal economy.—AFP



RIO DE JANEIRO: In this file photo, people wait to get donations of basic food supplies distributed by an NGO within the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak at the Cidade de Deus (City of God) favela in Rio de Janeiro. — AFP

Brazil GDP shrinks 1.5% in Q1

RIO DE JANEIRO: Brazil's economy—Latin America's largest—contracted by 1.5 percent in the first quarter due to the shutdown triggered by the coronavirus pandemic, the government reported Friday.

But the drop only reflects the early effects of the crisis because the lockdown measures that stalled the country's economy only began in mid-March. The figures were released amid a fierce political battle in Brazil over the pandemic, with far-right President Jair Bolsonaro urging state governors to end preventive lockdowns which he says are damaging the economy.

Government data released Thursday showed nearly five million people lost their jobs in the first quarter as the effects of the pandemic began to be felt, mainly in trade, construction and services. Analysts forecast unemployment, currently at 12.6 percent, to soar to more than 18 percent by the end of the year.

The 1.5 percent drop in GDP was in comparison to the last quarter of 2019, said the national statistics institute IBGE. When compared to the first quarter of 2019, the contraction was 0.3 percent. In the first three months

From the coronavirus frontline, doctors recall battling S Africa's HIV outbreak

CAPE TOWN: A deadly virus was ravaging South Africa when Belgian doctor Eric Goemaere first set foot in Cape Town's sprawling Khayelitsha township on a chilly southern hemisphere winter of 1999. By then HIV had infected more than 5.6 million South Africans, causing thousands of deaths from acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) - for which there is still no cure. "There was a traffic jam every day at the cemetery," Goemaere recalled. "People were dying like flies... There was no accessible treatment so the sick simply went to church." Two decades later, Goemaere and his colleagues at Doctors Without Borders (MSF) found themselves on the frontline of another epidemic. Cape Town's Western Cape province is now home to over 65 percent of South Africa's 27,403 confirmed coronavirus cases.

The coastal city has been pin-pointed as a "hotspot" of the novel respiratory disease and Khayelitsha has not been spared. "The number of people infected in the community is picking up rapidly," said Goemaere, who is now coordinating the opening of a 65-bed field hospital for COVID-19 patients in the township. After years spent fighting the spread of HIV in impoverished overcrowded settlements, veteran health workers like Goemaere are offering valuable insight for South Africa's coronavirus response. "We are still trying to bring the treatment close to where the problem is," said Goemaere. "But this time we were much faster in involving the community."



CAPE TOWN: A porter from a local hospital delivers bed linen to a field hospital being set up in a sports hall in Khayelitsha, near Cape Town. This field hospital is being set up with the support of Doctors Without Borders (MSF) as part of South Africa's fight against the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic.— AFP

HIV was a murky matter in 1999 Khayelitsha. While dozens succumbed to AIDS on a daily basis, treatment was only available in faraway hospitals at a steep \$11,000 (9,876 euros) per year. Local clinics were highly suspicious of doctors from the outside. "The nurses said: don't come here, we are all going to get infected," Goemaere said, remembering his first day on the field. "In fact,

the majority of cases in the waiting room were already infected, but there was no one testing so they didn't realize the danger."

AIDS, like coronavirus, was initially perceived as a foreign disease imported from richer countries. Once it spread through the township, it was widely associated to homosexuality and prostitution. In the early 2000s, activists such

as MSF nurse Nompumelelo Mantangana started touring Khayelitsha with "I am HIV positive" t-shirts to tackle stigma. "The problem we picked up with COVID-19 this time is the belief that white people are the ones importing the virus," Mantangana said. "We had to go back and work with the communities," she explained. "Once again our foot soldiers... are going door to door, giving out pamphlets and explaining what COVID is." The new enemy, she warned, was social media and videos "giving wrong information".

Finger prick tests

As HIV health workers gained trust among the community, attitudes towards the virus started to shift. "One day there were more than 100 people behind the door waiting for a consultation," Goemaere recalled, remembering that clinics were swamped by the unexpected turnout. When coronavirus hit, South Africa rapidly responded with mass screening and testing campaigns. Labs have been swamped as a consequence. "We faced a similar situation with HIV," said Goemaere. "In the very beginning, when we had to send all tests to a central lab." That backlog was resolved in 2001, with the invention of a rapid finger prick test. "That was a revolution," Goemaere said. "I can tell you, the day we can also have rapid (coronavirus) tests in Khayelitsha will be a game changer." "But bear in mind that people are not keen to test when there is no treatment," he added. "What's the point of getting bad news

when you can't do anything about it?"

Treatment for all

It was precisely treatment that first bought the 65-year old doctor to South Africa. During a trip to Thailand, Goemaere and his colleagues had discovered that HIV transmissions from mother to child could be cut by half with AZT — one of the first anti retroviral (ARV) drugs. Excited by the prospect of introducing AZT to South Africa, Goemaere was quashed by a government in complete denial of HIV that refused to support ARV treatment. "It was worse than bad," he recalled. "They were warning me to keep silent." At the time, nurses like Mantangana went behind former president Thabo Mbeki's back and smuggled ARVs into Khayelitsha.

"They didn't want MSF to use certain drugs," Mantangana said. "In the end we litigated our own government for them to give treatment to people." "With COVID we are seeing a different face. They (authorities) have acted swiftly this time, we are working together." Goemaere agreed, adding that the government's attitude to coronavirus was almost too panicked in comparison. Politics aside, the veteran doctor believed coronavirus - like HIV - could only be controlled with a treatment or cure affordable to all. For AIDS that was only in 2004, a mistake Goemaere hoped would not be repeated. "As soon as there is any (proven) treatment or vaccine," he said. "We will put maximum pressure to make it accessible to low income countries." — AFP

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Dr. Abdullah Al Haddad
Surgery Department
Consultant General Surgery, Laparoscopic & Colo – Rectal Surgeon

مستشفى دار الشفاء
Dar Al Shifa Hospital
Tele:1802 555

daralshifa
Email: aalhaddad@daralshifa.com

DR. FAHAD AL-MUKHAIZEEM
Consultant Pediatrician

Consultant Pediatrician-Canadian & American Board in Pediatrics-Canadian Board in Pediatric Emergency

Tel.: 22269369 - Fax: 22269368

Al-Jabriya - Block 1A - St.1 - Mazaya Building - 15th Floor - Clinic B

DR. WALEED S BUHAIMED
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Laparoscopic and Bariatric Surgery

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Cinema-goers in their cars attend the screening of the US musical romantic comedy film "Grease" during the reopening of the Autocine Madrid Race drive-in cinema, in Madrid.—AFP photos



Cinema-goers in their cars attend a screening of the US musical romantic comedy film "Grease" during the reopening of the Autocine Madrid Race drive-in cinema.



A boy leans on a car during the screening of the US musical romantic comedy film "Grease" during the reopening of the Autocine Madrid Race drive-in cinema.

SOCIAL DISTANCE CINEMA: 'GREASE' DRAWS CROWDS TO MADRID DRIVE-IN

For many, it was a long-awaited chance to feel normal again, sitting in their cars belting out "Summer Nights" at Madrid's drive-in cinema on a rare night out after a 10-week lockdown. It's opening night at this 1950s-themed venue and as the sun sets, vehicles begin pulling into the huge car park, ushers ensuring each is carefully positioned several metres apart. With cinemas emptied across the world because of the pandemic, drive-in screens have seen a resurgence in popularity, offering those who've been cooped up at home for months a safe way to go out. Two days after the Spanish capital finally began to emerge from one of the most restrictive lockdowns in the world, the Madrid Race reopened its doors with a screening of the 1978 hit musical "Grease". "We are the safest entertainment place in Madrid. It seems like drive-in cinema was made for a time like this," Madrid Race co-founder Cristina Porta told AFP, saying tickets for the month sold out in

one day. For the venue, the epidemic and the resulting restrictions have opened a whole new business opportunity. "We've already got seven concerts booked and we're going to do theatre, masses, comedy, monologues and a bit of everything," she told AFP. "This summer, there's going to be a lot more than just cinema. There will be a lot of action and a lot of rock and roll."

'Your car like your home'

As night falls, the lights come on at the chrome metal diner, the "corn truck" is churning out buckets of popcorn and beer is flowing at the bar as staff in gloves and visors serve the growing crowd as they wait for the film to start. "It gives you a real sense of freedom. We really wanted to get out of the house," says 22-year-old Belen Perez who has come with her flatmate after finishing teacher training school. "We came a few years ago and we liked it so we thought it would be a safe option," she

says, her eyes smiling over her mask.

On a normal night, there would be space for 375 cars but with Madrid only just reopening after suffering the brunt of an epidemic which in Spain claimed over 27,000 lives, they have limited entries to 100. For now, the diner is closed to the public and tables are well-spaced at the bar terrace with customers able to order food through an app, with waiters delivering it to their car within 10 minutes. "At the end of the day, your car is an extension of your home," says Porta. "With these measures, it's enough to ensure there's zero risk of infection."

'Great, safe entertainment'

And cinemagoers agree. "Everyone has their own private space, there aren't many surfaces where you could pick up infection because during the film, no one gets out of their car and if you want to order food you

can do that online," agrees Perez. "It's a great way of being entertained safely." For many, it's the first time they've been to a drive in, watching the film through their windscreen and hearing the soundtrack through a frequency on the car radio. "To be honest, it feels safer than most other things, even doing your daily shopping," said 28-year-old Daniel Martin, an aeronautical engineer.

"I'm grateful to be here, even though you're a bit enclosed. At least we're socialising a bit even though we're separated, and that's something," he told AFP. "Although we've seen the film more than 10 times, seeing it like this is something new. We've never been to a drive-in cinema before, so we're killing two birds with one stone!"—AFP



In this file park patrons meet Mickey Mouse during a special after hours event for Disney World's "Year of a Million Dreams" give away, at Disney World's Magic Kingdom in Orlando, Florida, May 7, 2008. — AFP

Disney and other Florida theme parks to re-open in June, July

Maintaining social distancing and wearing masks, tourists visiting Florida will be able to take photos with Mickey Mouse again when Disney World reopens on July 11, a month after SeaWorld and Universal Studios are set to do the same, officials said Friday. "Walt Disney World Resort and Sea World have received approval of their re-opening plans," said Jerry Demings, mayor of Orange County, home to the city of Orlando where the parks are located.

Florida has green-lit the reopening of Sea World for June 10 and Walt Disney World for July 11, the mayor said. The Disney parks "Magic Kingdom" and "Animal Kingdom" will open the same day, followed by the EPCOT center on July 15.

The Universal Studios theme park already has approval to reopen on June 5, after the abrupt closure of Orlando's theme parks in mid-March in a bid to slow the spread of the coronavirus pandemic. "It may be different from the last time you visited," Disney World's website said. "But together, we can find new ways to create magical moments—and memories to treasure." Orlando, located in central Florida, is home to most of the state's theme parks and draws millions of visitors from around the world every year.—AFP

The Louvre museum in Paris, home to the Mona Lisa, is to reopen on July 6 after the government allowed French museums and historic sites to reopen their doors following the coronavirus shutdown, it said Friday. France is to further ease restrictions imposed to combat the virus from Tuesday but it will only be in July that many top museums and attractions reopen, although some plan to do so in June. Culture Minister Franck Riester confirmed Friday that wearing a mask would be obligatory for visiting a museum in France while some will have to impose prior reservation systems to avoid a heavy influx of visitors.

"The implementation of a reservation system as well as new signs will allow us to offer maximum safety to our visitors, in addition to wearing a mask and respecting social distancing," the Louvre said in a statement. It added that online reservations for visiting the Louvre when it reopens on July 6 would open on June 15. The Louvre has been closed since March 13. "Even if we were able to discover the treasures of the Louvre in a virtual way during the lockdown, nothing can replace the

emotion of meeting a work in a real way," said the Louvre's director Jean-Luc Martinez. "This is the raison-d'être of museums." "We all need a meeting with art that is sensitive and real. A meeting with art, with beauty, can heal our souls," he added.

After the success of its blockbuster Leonardo exhibition which closed earlier this year, the Louvre said its two exhibitions scheduled for spring and then postponed would now take place in the autumn. These are on Italian sculpture from Donatello to Michaelangelo and the renaissance German master Albrecht Dürer. The Louvre has upped its virtual presence during the lockdown and said it was now the most followed museum in the world on Instagram with over four million followers. For other sites, the former royal residence the Chateau de Versailles outside Paris will open on June 6 while the Musee d'Orsay of impressionist masterworks will open from June 23, the ministry of culture said. The iconic Pompidou Centre for modern art in Paris will reopen on July 1.—AFP



In this file photo taken on March 13, 2020 an employee walks in the Cour Marly at the Musee du Louvre in Paris, indefinitely closed to the public amid concerns on the COVID-19 outbreak, caused by the novel coronavirus.



A combination of photographs created on May 20, 2020 shows (up) the empty Cour Napoleon with the Louvre Pyramid (Pyramide du Louvre) designed by Ieoh Ming Pei, in Paris, on April 2, 2020 during a strict lockdown in France to stop the spread of COVID-19 (novel coronavirus), and (down) people walking and running past the same spot, on May 19, 2020 as France eases lockdown measures taken to curb the spread of the COVID-19 (the novel coronavirus).—AFP photos

AS MONTREAL'S COMMUNITY GARDENS REOPEN, FANS FEEL RELIEF

In Montreal, the centre of the coronavirus pandemic in Canada, the reopening of highly popular community vegetable gardens after a two-month lockdown has come as a breath of fresh air—despite rigid new rules. "Just to touch the earth, it's like reconnecting with something deep inside of us, it does our souls good, it lessens the chaos and I think we really need that," said Manon Labelle, a protective mask covering her mouth.

At 62 — and having lost her father to COVID-19 just a week ago—Labelle is relieved to return to her small plot in the De Lorimier garden. In this 5,000-square-meter (1.2 acre) community garden in the Plateau Mont-Royal, Montreal's most densely crowded neighbourhood, urban gardeners cultivate some 180 small plots every summer on city-owned property. On this highly anticipated day, brilliant sunshine and summer-like warmth combined to make people forget that only two weeks ago it was still snowing here.

'Essential service'

Several of the garden's regulars were concerned that its reopening, already put off by a month, might again be delayed. "We were afraid there might be no garden," and at a time when food self-sufficiency has become an ever more important topic, said Christine Lamothe, a 50-something local who arrived with a bundle of seeds. "The city closed the gardens two months ago, and it caused an uproar," said Stephane

Espinosa, who chairs the garden's oversight committee. "In fact, they were closed all over Canada."

As the pandemic spread in mid-March, gardens "were not considered as an essential service" despite their "nutritional and psychological value," said Espinosa, a native of the French city of Marseille. But after garden enthusiasts bombarded officials with complaints and petitions, they finally earned "essential" status, added Espinosa, a Quebecer for 15 years.

Safety and sanitary rules

"For many people," said Montreal Mayor Valerie Plante, "community gardens are more than just for

leisure. They allow them to better fill their needs and gain access to fresh products at low cost." But officials quickly issued "safety and sanitary rules" for the 97 gardens created in Montreal 45 years ago. Most restrictive is a new rule limiting to 35 the number of people allowed in a garden at any given time—whereas in past years one might find as many as 400 people at work, including garden members and their families.

Further, everyone must respect social-distancing, and gardeners are encouraged to wear masks and gloves. People must wash their hands when entering the garden, while also disinfecting garden gates and water spigots. And to limit crowds, gardeners will be allowed

to come only every other day until June 1, Lamothe said. "The biggest change is not having access to our own tools, which we normally share with each other. You have to bring your own things from home," said another gardener, Yan Poudrier. "Usually we would come as a family, me and my three children. Unfortunately, with the restrictions this year on the number of individuals, it's hard to come with all three," said the 39-year-old.—AFP



Aerial view of De Lorimier community garden after a two month lockdown in Montreal, Quebec, Canada.



Aerial view of De Lorimier community garden after a two month lockdown in Montreal, Quebec.



Aerial view of De Lorimier community garden after a two month lockdown in Montreal.— AFP photos



Venetian gondola manufacturer, Roberto Dei Rossi poses by gondolas under construction at his boatyard in Venice, as the country eases its lockdown within the COVID-19 pandemic caused by the novel coronavirus. — AFP photos



A builder sands a gondola at the Venetian gondola manufacturer, Roberto Dei Rossi boatyard in Venice.



A Gondola builder files wood at the Venetian gondola manufacturer, Roberto Dei Rossi boatyard in Venice.



Elisabetta Tramontin hand sands a gondola at the historic Tramontin and Figli boatyard in Venice.

'Dark days' for Venice gondola makers



Picture taken in the 30s shows the bridge of Sighs in Venice..

Already under threat, Venice's traditional gondola shipyards now lie silent apart from the gentle sound of canal water lapping at their doorsteps. When Italian master Canaletto was painting his panoramas of the floating city in the 18th century, the "squeri", as they are known, were ten a penny. Now only four of the small shipyards remain. All of them have been at a near or complete standstill since a blanket ban on sailing gondolas was imposed during the coronavirus pandemic.

"Venice without gondolas is dark and meaningless," said Roberto Dei Rossi, one of the few remaining traditional carpenters who build the long black boats. The 58-year-old crafts between four and five gondolas a year by hand, each one taking some 400 hours to make. "Every time I put a new one into the water, it's like witnessing a birth. It's my creation," he told AFP.

Fit for a king

The boats are just over 10 metres (32 feet) long, 1.38 metres wide and weigh 600 kilograms (1,320 pounds). They are made up of 280 pieces of wood from eight different species of tree—oak, larch, walnut, cherry, basswood, cedar, mahogany, and fir. They are bought almost exclusively by gondoliers, who pay between 30,000 euros (\$33,000) and 50,000 euros



Undated picture shows gondolas on a canal in Venice.

depending on the finish. Each is made to measure and adapted to the weight of its new owner. "We also have had a few enthusiasts who have placed orders with us, in the United States, Germany and Japan," said Dei Rossi.

They were once considered a present fit for a king: some, along with their gondoliers, were offered by Venice's Doge to France's Louis XIV for the "royal flotilla" that sailed on the Palace of Versailles' Grand Canal. The bulk of the fleet now glides along the canals of Venice, punted by some 400 gondoliers. Would-be newcomers have to bid for a limited number of navigation licences granted by the city hall. These are glum times for gondoliers though: the pandemic has put a temporary end to romantic tours by water.

The sector had already suffered during exceptional high tides at the end of last year, which put off tourists and damaged boats. They will sail again once tourists are allowed to return to Italy from June 3, covering their noses and mouths with masks—a far cry from the city's flamboyant carnival costumes.

'Axe masters'

Italy's government imposed a national lockdown in early March. Images of pristine waters in Venice after marine traffic was halted went viral around the world. But the long shutdown was bad news for the ship-

yards, which not only make but also repair and maintain gondolas. It has been particularly hard for the Tramontin shipyard, the oldest workshop still active in Venice.

Bordering the Ognissanti Canal, it was taken over by two young sisters in 2018 after the death of their father Roberto Tramontin, heir to a family business founded by his great-grandfather in 1884. "With dad no longer around, the main thing was missing," said Elena Tramontin, 33, who decided along with her younger sister Elisabetta to do what they could to keep the company alive. "We had to reinvent ourselves," she told AFP.

Despite having no experience and no previous plans to enter the gondola-building business, they took the plunge, relying heavily on the help of gondola carpentry experts known as the "maestri d'ascia", or "axe masters". "My sister is in charge of public relations, the cultural side of the business, which is important, and I paint and do some small repairs on the boats," Elisabetta Tramontin said.

The art graduate, 30, says that despite the obstacles—be they high tides or viruses—they are determined to honour their father's memory and transform "Tramontin and sons" into "Tramontin and daughters". "You don't get rich with this job, you have to have passion. But it does bring a lot of satisfaction," she said.—AFP



Two Gondoliers ride a gondola between past the San Giorgio Maggiore church (Rear) and moored gondolas in Venice, as the country eases its lockdown within the COVID-19 pandemic caused by the novel coronavirus.

Venice film fest a 'sign of hope' for world cinema

The decision to hold the Venice Film Festival despite the coronavirus pandemic is being hailed as a "sign of hope" for the movie world after months of closed cinemas, shuttered film sets and cancelled galas. The rapid global spread of the virus forced major production companies to halt filming, and top silver-screen festivals to postpone or cancel their 2020 edi-

and organisers in the canal city are betting on a return to normality in the hard-hit north of the country by the end of the summer. The first post-coronavirus festival will nonetheless have to adopt new sanitary and social distancing rules. "It will be a unique edition. We still don't know exactly what we'll be able to do, but in the meantime are selecting the films and drawing up

celebrate, to show vitality, is the oldest festival in the world," he said. Barbera has repeatedly ruled out the suggestion the prestigious event could be held online, leaving film experts to suggest the number of films shown—generally over 200—will be noticeably reduced. Familiar scenes of throngs of paparazzi snapping photographs of A-listers on the red carpet and signing autographs for screaming crowds of fans are also unlikely. Festival expert Angela Prudenzi told AFP that this year, "all eyes will be on the films, which is a very good thing".

Rivalry with Cannes

What remains unclear is how the cancelled Cannes festival could work with Venice's festival—or step on its toes. Thierry Fremaux, the Cannes festival's director, has said he and Barbera have discussed the possibility of some type of collaboration, without providing details. One complication for Venice, which has not yet released its roster of films, is that Cannes is set to unveil its own selection on Wednesday. The 50 to 60 films on the list will not be shown on the Croisette, but will benefit from the "Cannes 2020" label created after the cancellation of the 73rd edition.

Whether some of those films show at Venice instead, or bypass the Mostra entirely to premiere at other festivals such as Toronto or San Sebastian, remains unclear. The Hollywood Reporter reported that Italian director Nanni Moretti's latest film, "Tre piani", based on Israeli Eshkol Nevo's novel Three Floors Up, was set for Cannes, but will go to Venice instead. Big US films that had been expected to premiere at Cannes—including Wes Anderson's "The French Dispatch" and Pixar's animated feature "Soul"—have pushed back their releases to later this year.

Where to watch

Traditionally held on the Lido, Venice's festival could include new spaces for film viewing this year. Some have suggested that the Arsenal shipyards, where the city's famed art and archi-



In this file photo taken on August 28, 2019 an employee works outside the Palazzo del Cinema on the opening day of the 76th Venice Film Festival at Venice Lido.—AFP



In this file photo taken on May 23, 2017 A general view shows guests arriving at the Festival Palace for the 70th Anniversary ceremony of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France. — AFP

tions—including Venice's historic rival Cannes, usually held in May. Despite Italy being among the worst-hit countries, with over 33,000 deaths, the director of the Venice Film Festival, Alberto Barbera, is defiant in the face of the disease, insisting the 77th edition of the "Mostra" will go ahead from September 2 to 12.

Italy has been slowly exiting its lockdown

a plan to allow everyone to participate safely," Barbera said on Instagram this week.

Giorgio Gosetti, head of the renowned parallel Venice Days competition for innovative or original filmmaking, told AFP it was "as if we were starting over again from 1932, when the festival was founded". "Everyone in the world of cinema... feels that right now the best place to

Singapore otters' antics in lockdown spark backlash

SINGAPORE: Singapore's otters, long adored by the city-state's nature lovers, are popping up in unexpected places during the coronavirus lockdown but their antics have angered some and even sparked calls for a cull. With the streets empty, the creatures have been spotted hanging out by a shopping center, scampering through the lobby of a hospital and even feasting on pricey fish stolen from a pond.

While many think of tiny Singapore as a densely populated concrete jungle, it is also relatively green for a busy Asian city, and has patches of rainforest, fairly clean waterways and abundant wildlife. There are estimated to be about 90 otters in Singapore, making up 10 families, and appearances at popular tourist sites around the city-state's downtown waterfront have transformed them into local celebrities.

They featured in a documentary narrated by David Attenborough, are tracked avidly by the local media – and have been spotted more frequently since people were asked to stay home and workplaces closed in April to fight the virus. “When there's restriction of movement, there's less vehicles and there's less people, so the urban space opens up,” said N Sivasothi, a biologist at the National University of Singapore known as “Otterman” due to his work on the animals. But their newfound freedoms appear to have emboldened the otters, and they are now facing a backlash.

'More daring'

The most high-profile incident was a raid on a pond at a spa shuttered due to the pandemic. The creatures gobbled several fish including an arowana, a prized species that can sell for tens of thousands of dollars. Actress-turned-entrepreneur Jazreel Low, who owns the spa, posted pictures on Facebook of fish parts scattered around the pond and lamented a “massacre”. “They probably realized that there was nobody there and became more daring,” Low told entertainment news website 8 DAYS.

The case sparked a debate about whether

Unrest flares in US despite...

Continued from Page 1

“This case is now ready, and we have charged it,” said county prosecutor Mike Freeman as outrage grew over the latest death of an African American in police custody.

But the charges failed to calm a shaken nation whose deep wounds over racial inequality have been torn open anew, with riots raging from New York to Los Angeles in one of the worst nights of civil unrest in years. In Atlanta police cruisers were attacked and set ablaze as rallies spun out of control, while in the capital Washington protesters collided with Secret Service agents in heated midnight scenes in front of the White House. Protests took hold in a swathe of cities including Boston, Dallas, Denver, Des Moines, Houston, Las Vegas, Memphis, and Portland.

Authorities imposed a curfew Friday in Minneapolis after three nights of protests left parts of the city in flames. But the demonstrators, many wearing masks to prevent the spread of coronavirus, defiantly remained on the streets, facing off with police who fired tear gas and flashbangs in efforts to regain control. Looting was widespread, with images showing people coming out of shops carrying armfuls of goods.

Officers were shot at by protesters, Minnesota's governor Tim Walz told reporters early yesterday. “This is not about George's death. This is not about inequities that were real. This is about chaos,” he said. But that view was not shared on the streets. “I need you to look in my eyes and feel me,” said pro-

Immigration to Canada sharply...

Continued from Page 1

will be industries with labor shortages, urban rental and housing markets, and universities, according to the report. “Canada will need a younger and growing population to maintain

Suspicious transactions...

Continued from Page 1

with regards to any mishandling of public funds, he said, affirming its determination to take legal action against any such wrongdoing. HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah has given explicit instructions to deal with these cases firmly and apply the law on everyone “no matter how social and professional he (or she) may be,” he added.

Billions of dollars were plundered from Malaysia's IMDB state investment fund and spent on everything from a luxury yacht to artwork in a fraud allegedly involving former Malaysian premier Najib Razak and his inner circle. Najib was ejected in 2018 elections largely due to public anger over the scandal and is now facing trial over his involvement in the theft.

Meanwhile, the United States said Thursday it

more should be done to stop otters rampaging through the city, with a widely discussed letter in a local newspaper calling for air horns and rubber bullets to be used as deterrents. “Wild boars have never been encouraged to enter urban areas, neither should otters be just because they look cute,” wrote Ong Junkai in the correspondence to the Straits Times, which triggered calls from some for a cull.

In other incidents, a video showed a group charging into the lobby of a children's hospital before being shoed away, and the creatures were also filmed frolicking in the empty streets outside a popular shopping center. The otters' more frequent forays onto the streets of Singapore are part of a global trend triggered by virus lockdowns, with animals increasingly slipping cover to explore the streets of some of the world's biggest cities.

'Coexist and thrive'

Still, otter experts believe the anger is an over-reaction and that the creatures are likely just enjoying the extra freedom to venture to new places. NUS's Sivasothi criticized calls for a cull as “quite an uneducated response”, and said such a move would be ineffective. He also said many recent sightings were likely of the same family of smooth-coated otters, which have been searching for a new home along the city's rivers. Most of Singapore's otters are the smooth-coated variety, classified as “vulnerable”.

Fans believe people should be celebrating the return of an animal that was driven out of Singapore by coastal development and water pollution around the 1970s, and only started reappearing in the 1990s as waterways were cleaned. “I simply don't understand anyone who could not like them. They are really cute,” said Pam Wong, a 35-year-old Singaporean.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong weighed in on the debate Friday, posting a photo he took of otters before the lockdown on his Facebook account. “Rather than being focused on protecting ‘territory’, we must find ways to coexist and thrive with our local flora and fauna,” he wrote. — AFP

tester Naema Jakes. “This is pain, this is hurt.”

Floyd's relatives – who spoke Friday with Trump – welcomed news of the officer's arrest as a “step on the road to justice”. But they said they hoped for tougher charges and action against the other officers involved in Floyd's detention and death. “We want a first-degree murder charge. And we want to see the other officers arrested. The pain that the black community feels over this murder and what it reflects about the treatment of black people in America is raw and is spilling out onto streets across America,” they said in a statement.

Freeman said the three other officers present when Floyd died were also under investigation, and that he anticipated charges would be laid against them. All four were fired from the police department Tuesday after video surfaced of the arrest. Protesters gathered outside officer Chauvin's vandalized Minneapolis home Friday, raising placards to passing cars and chanting Floyd's name. “All I can do is just cry, and cry some more,” Tara Balian, 39, told AFP. “It's taken this long for people to realize that black lives matter.” Several protesters chanted “I can't breathe” – Floyd's words as Chauvin's knee pressed on his neck.

Trump, after attacking the protesters as “thugs” and threatening to send in federal troops to deal harshly with them, shifted tone Friday, announcing he had called Floyd's family to express his “sorrow”. “I understand the hurt, I understand the pain. People have really been through a lot,” said the president, who stands accused of stoking tensions with a series of provocative tweets. Former vice president Joe Biden, who is challenging Trump for the White House in November's election, also spoke to Floyd's family. He called for justice and said it was time to heal the “open wound” of systemic racism in the United States. — AFP

growth and support the unprecedented expansion of the fiscal deficit that came in response to the crisis,” Agopsowicz said.

Only foreigners with permanent resident status or a study permit approved before March 18 are allowed in the country. Already in March, 30 percent fewer people gained permanent residency compared with the previous year. “If these restrictions last all summer, we expect to see 170,000 fewer permanent residents entering the country in 2020 than planned,” Agopsowicz said. — AFP

has approved the sale of 84 of the most recent generation of Patriot missiles to Kuwait, plus equipment to modernize the country's antimissile program, for a total of \$1.425 billion. The State Department said in a statement that sale benefits both parties.

“The proposed sale will support the foreign policy and national security of the United States by helping to improve the security of a Major Non-NATO Ally that is an important force for political stability and economic progress in the Middle East,” the statement said.

“The proposed sale of these articles and services will improve Kuwait's capability to meet current and future threats and provide greater security for its critical oil and natural gas infrastructure,” it added, alluding to the September 2019 assaults on Saudi oilfields that US officials attributed to Iran.

The contract for the missiles and their attendant parts, made by US defense group Lockheed Martin, is valued at \$800 million. Another contract for training and technical assistance, provided by Lockheed Martin and defense contractor Raytheon, is valued at \$425 million. And a third, to be handled by those same companies, is valued at \$200 million for repair of old material. — Agencies



SINGAPORE: This photograph taken on Friday shows people taking pictures of a bevy of smooth-coated otters along a canal. — AFP

Virus hopes, fears center...

Continued from Page 1

due to prior exposure to ‘common cold’ coronaviruses”. Balloux said that might explain issues like cases where there is no transmission between spouses.

Earlier this month, an American study in the journal Cell suggested between 40 and 60 percent of the population could be immunized against COVID-19 without ever being exposed to it. Researchers put this down to the action of protective cells, known as T lymphocytes, that had been activated by other coronaviruses responsible for colds.

But authors Alessandro Sette and Shane Crotty, of La Jolla Institute for Immunology, cautioned that the research did not suggest the epidemic was running out of steam. “Clearly some individuals are more susceptible to the disease than others: after being infected some individuals have severe clinical symptoms and might even die, while others might show very little in terms of clinical symptoms,” they told AFP by email. “Our study suggests that preexisting immunity might be one of the factors to be considered; but at this point is simply an hypothesis that needs to be addressed with further experiments.”

The World Health Organization has also expressed caution over the issue. “There is certainly some evidence with regard to T cells, that if you have a previous coronavirus infection you may be able to mount a more rapid response to COVID-19,” said the WHO's Michael Ryan at a press conference this week. “But there's no empirical evidence that previous coronavirus infections protect you from infection with COVID-19. The jury is still very much out on that,” he added.

However, Ryan said it was an encouraging sign for the development of vaccines. “It gives us hope that we are getting the kinds of immune responses that may be

helpful to long-term protection,” he said. Another uncertainty is whether everyone is equally vulnerable to catching COVID-19. A growing number of scientists think maybe not, raising questions over assumptions for what is known as herd immunity.

Gabriela Gomes, a researcher at the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, told AFP that it was wrong to assume that one person is as susceptible to the virus as another, or as exposed. “We know little about the factors which underlie this individual variation. It could be cross-immunity with other coronaviruses, but it could also be other microbes, genetics, age, behavior, and most likely a combination of many factors,” she said.

In theory this could explain why early estimates of the proportion of individuals who have been infected by the new coronavirus have been lower than expected – at around 5 to 10 percent of the total population in several countries. It could also mean a lower threshold for herd immunity – when a sufficient part of the population has caught the virus, starving it of new hosts to spread to and thereby stopping the epidemic.

This threshold, commonly accepted as around 60 to 70 percent of the population infected, is what Sweden hoped to achieve by deciding against a strict lockdown. But Gomes said that mathematical models on herd immunity often “ignore individual variation”.

According to a study she co-authored, which has not yet been peer reviewed, the threshold might be reached when just 10 to 20 percent of the population has been infected. Gomes said her research, which simulated the lifting of social distancing measures over the next six to 12 months, suggested that even if countries that had been severely affected are “closer to herd immunity”, they would still see more localized outbreaks. There could also be “what may seem like a second wave in those countries that have been less affected so far”.

At the Pitie-Salpetriere hospital in Paris, professor of emergency medicine Yonathan Freund has noticed a sharp drop in the number of infections among doctors compared with the start of the epidemic. “This is pure speculation but it could mean that people have natural or acquired immunity,” he told AFP. — AFP

Trump cuts WHO ties; Merkel to...

Continued from Page 1

situation, she cannot agree to her personal participation, to a journey to Washington,” German government spokesman Steffen Seibert told Politico. “The federal chancellor thanks President Trump for his invitation to the G7 summit,” he said. Merkel is the first to give a firm no, while other world leaders have expressed vaguely positive responses.

The pandemic has since claimed almost 364,000 lives globally and the number of cases is nearing six million. Populations are now learning to adjust to life with the long-term threat of infection as the virus continues its march around the globe and a vaccine remains elusive. As the disease spreads across South America, the poor have been hit hard in countries like Brazil, which now has the second highest number of cases in the world after the United States.

Lockdowns have interrupted the meager services many depend on, such as school lunches for hungry children and water deliveries. “In 26 years, I've never seen so many people living in fear, so many people going hungry,” said Alcione Albanesi, founder of charity Amigos do Bem, which distributes supplies to communities in the impoverished Sertao region of Brazil's northeast. “Everything has ground to a stop. But hunger doesn't stop.” Chile also logged another record number of deaths on Friday, pushing its total to almost 1,000.

The surge in the Americas comes as the number of infections continues to fall in much of Europe, which is pressing on down the path to re-opening after months of crippling lockdowns. Italy's iconic Leaning Tower of Pisa was set to open yesterday, cinemas will reopen in Austria, and parks are scheduled to throw open their gates in Paris.

Tourism-dependent Greece said it will restart its

Salmiya blocks 10, 12: Locked...

Continued from Page 1

and Nugra, Khaitan, Farwaniya, Maidan Hawally as well Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and Mahboula, a total isolation will be in effect. Authorities have already begun

two main airports for arrivals from 29 countries from June 15. But some European nations hard hit by the virus are not on the list, including France, Spain, Britain and Italy. In Austria, hotels were on Friday allowed to take in tourists again under special guidelines, provided masks are worn. “It's of course a lot more effort now. But the most important thing is that guests return,” Gilbert Kratschmann, marketing manager at the Das Triest hotel in Vienna, told AFP.

Turkey too moved ahead with easing its restrictions as mosques opened for the first time in months, drawing hundreds of worshippers in masks for mass prayers in Istanbul. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said many other sites – restaurants and cafes as well as libraries, parks and beaches – will reopen from Monday.

Hundreds of worshippers wearing protective masks performed mass prayers outside Istanbul's historic Blue Mosque for the first time since mosques were shut down in March. In the Ottoman-era Fatih mosque, worshippers prayed both inside and outside, with the municipality handing out disinfectants and disposable carpets.

Muslim clerics on Friday recited prayers in the Hagia Sophia, the world famous Istanbul landmark which is now a museum after serving as a church and a mosque. The prayers were held to celebrate the anniversary of the conquest of Constantinople, today's Istanbul, by the Ottomans in 1453. “It is very important to commemorate the 567th anniversary of the conquest ... through prayers in the Hagia Sophia,” said Erdogan, who attended the ceremony via video-conference.

Denmark said it would reopen its border to visitors from Germany, Norway and Iceland from June 15, although Britain and the rest of the European Union will have to wait a few more months for access.

Across the Atlantic, the US capital Washington resumed outdoor dining with social distancing precautions in place, and in New York Governor Andrew Cuomo said the state was “on track” to begin reopening in the week of June 8, even as the death toll in the US spiked again by 1,225 on Friday. — Agencies <#>

cordoning off Hawally, Farwaniya and Khaitan.

In the initial statement made by the Cabinet after its meeting on Thursday, Maidan Hawally's blocks 10, 11 and 12 were mentioned for the lockdown. But there are no blocks 10, 11 and 12 in Maidan Hawally. Later, the government clarified to say that all of Maidan Hawally will be included. But what officially is Maidan Hawally? On most maps and even the PACI building registry, it seems that what most people call Maidan Hawally is actually Salmiya block 11.

Stars

Daily SuDoku

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medium


Friday's Solution

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

very hard


STAR TRACK

Aries (March 21-April 19)



Emotionally speaking, you're a bit vulnerable today, Aries, and it may be hard to find shelter from the storm. It's drafty under your umbrella, and water seems to be leaking in from the top. Comfort yourself by centering and enjoying a quiet evening at home. Don't let other people's unsolved problems infect your space. Differentiate between issues that concern you and those that are out of your control.

Libra (September 23-October 22)



Don't be surprised if things don't go exactly according to plan today, Libra. Unexpected events are likely to pop up and disturb the course of action. Realize that these disruptions have a place in your life and that they're occurring for a reason. You might not understand exactly how or why, but that's OK. You don't need to know. Welcome these new energies into your life.

Taurus (April 20-May 20)




Explore your innovative, irrational side today, Taurus. Go deep. Your emotions might rebel to this departure from the norm, but instead of letting this put a damper on your progress, let that energy to spur you to action. Take advantage of the new gadgets and technology available to you. Incredible resources lie at your fingertips. Don't be afraid to harness their power to your advantage.

Scorpio (October 23-November 21)



Emotionally speaking, you're a bit vulnerable today, Scorpio, and it may be hard to find shelter from the storm. It's drafty under your umbrella, and water seems to be leaking in from the top. Comfort yourself by centering and enjoying a quiet evening at home. Don't let other people's unsolved problems infect your space. Differentiate between issues that concern you and those that are out of your control.

Gemini (May 21-June 20)




You might want to stay in and not speak to anyone today, Gemini. If you decide to put on your facemask and go out for some exercise, you could run into opposition wherever you turn. Don't see this as negative. Use it as incentive to work harder toward your goals. There are strong forces egging you on, so act confidently. Find a way to release your pent-up emotions, or they'll do you more harm than good.

Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)



Unexpected events may crop up and nudge you painfully, Sagittarius. You could get the feeling that these thorns are poking out of nowhere simply to annoy you. Maintain a stable attitude and consider adding unconventional aspects to your daily routine. Today's crazy whirlwind of activity could disrupt your emotions a bit. Don't get frustrated by things you can't control; it's already a long list.

Cancer (June 21-July 22)




You may feel like you're rubbing against sandpaper today, Cancer. It's probably a result of deep issues within yourself, possibly aggravated by the constant tension between old and new energies clashing within your world. This is one of those days in which things come to a head. Pieces of your inner being are hitting you square in the face. Blame it all on the COVID-19 crisis, treat yourself gently, and try again tomorrow.

Capricorn (December 22-January 19)




Today you have the ability to make an important breakthrough in something you've been working on, Capricorn. Try not to get bogged down by emotions, which may leave you feeling heavy and stale. Infuse the day with a blast of unconventional thinking. Adopt a fresh attitude toward whatever it is you want to accomplish. A new perspective is all you need to make this day productive.

Leo (July 23-August 22)




Examine your emotions, Leo, and trust your instincts. Unexpected forces may disrupt your preferred flow of things. Know that you'll have no problem keeping the situation under control as long as you stay solid and focused. Your actions today will have long-lasting effects, so be conscious of how you use your energy. Incorporate the old as well as the new in your game plan.

Aquarius (January 20-February 18)




You may feel like you're rubbing against sandpaper today, Aquarius. It's probably a result of deep issues within yourself, possibly aggravated by the constant tension between old and new energies clashing within your world. This is one of those days in which things come to a head. Pieces of your inner being are hitting you square in the face. Blame it all on the COVID-19 crisis, treat yourself gently, and try again tomorrow.

Virgo (August 23-September 22)



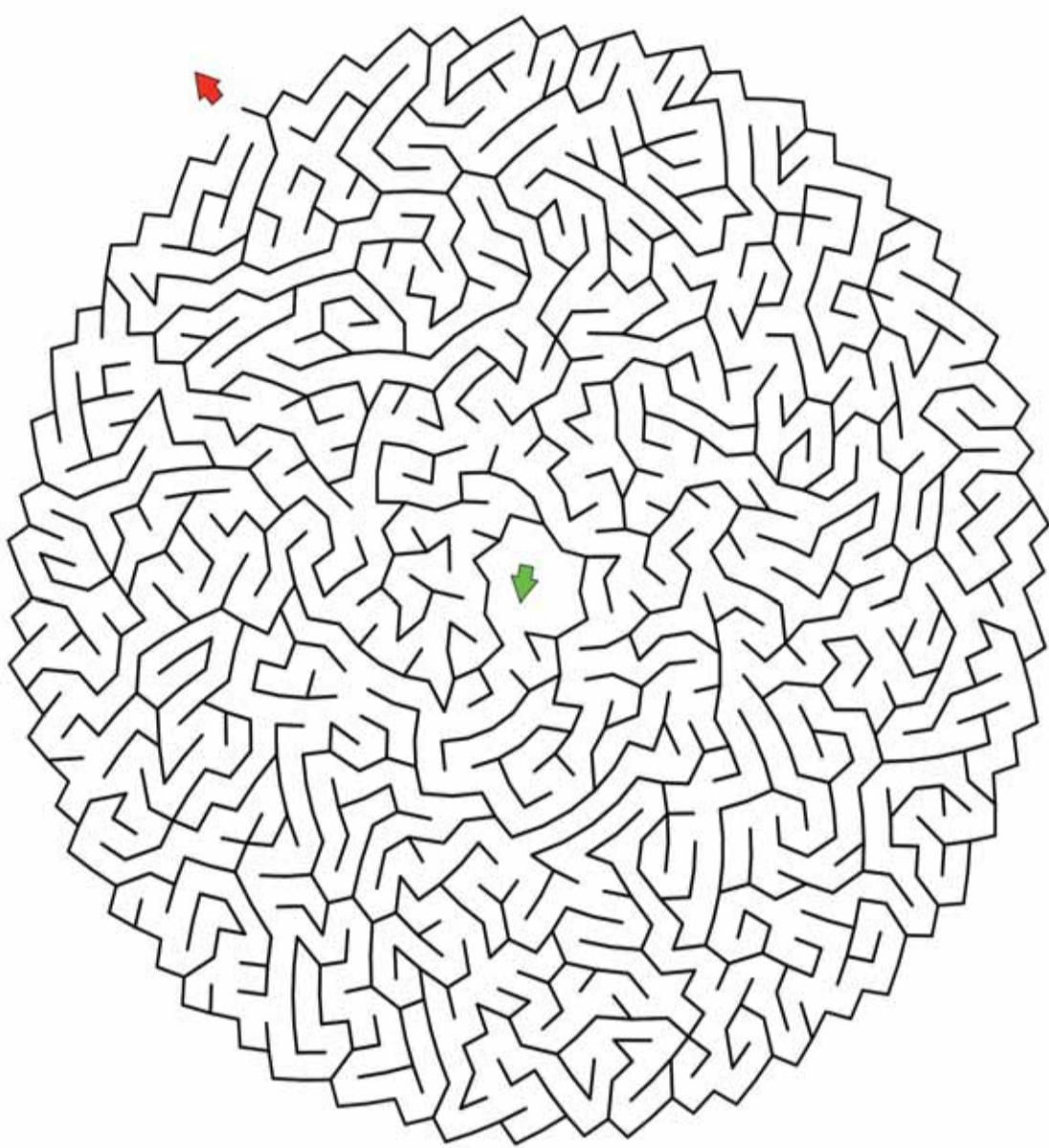
This is one of those days in which you might not be fully appreciated for the wonderful breath of fresh air you bring to the group, Virgo. It may seem that the old and the stale are seeking revenge on anyone attempting change. Don't give in to the negative forces that would keep you from fully expressing yourself. Be confident that you have what it takes to be successful in whatever path you decide to follow.

Pisces (February 19-March 20)



You may feel like you're walking on burning coals today, Pisces. Someone has also tossed you a flaming ball, and you need to figure out what to do with it. Use your fancy footwork and juggling skills to keep from searing your feet and hands as you think fast about your next move. Being stubborn gets you nowhere. The key is staying flexible and going with the flow, because the unexpected might actually work in your favor.

Find the way



Join the dots



Word Search

Oktoberfest Word Search



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

D	S	D	J	X	U	Y	F	O	S	G	V	N	X	K	P	G	M	S
H	H	T	Z	X	Y	N	E	T	R	A	G	R	E	I	B	E	X	U
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ACCORDION **COSTUME** **OKTOBERFEST**
AUTUMN **DANCING** **POLKA**
BAVARIA **DIRNDL** **PRETZELS**
BEER **DUMPLINGS** **RADISH**
BIERGARTEN **GERMANY** **SAUERKRAUT**
BRASS BAND **KEG** **SINGING**
BRATWURST **LEDERHOSEN** **TANKER**
CAROUSEL **MUNICH** **TENT**



Sports

Photo of the day



Participant training for Red Bull X-Alps 2019. —Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

‘Am I next?’ Tennis phenom Gauff upset by black man’s death

LOS ANGELES: Rising US tennis star Coco Gauff has added her voice to those expressing outrage at the death of an unarmed black man in Minnesota who was in police hands.

Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin, who can be seen in video kneeling on the neck of a handcuffed George Floyd for at least five minutes, was charged with murder in Floyd’s death on Friday as violent protests continued around the country.

Gauff, a 16-year-old African American, posted a TikTok video on her Twitter feed, juxtaposing an image of herself clad in a black hoodie with photos of Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Trayvon Martin and others.

Arbery, a 25-year-old black man, was killed on February 23 while running in a residential neighborhood in Brunswick, Georgia.

Taylor an emergency medical technician who was black, was shot and killed by police who burst into her home in Kentucky in March. Martin was a high school student when he was shot in 2012 in a killing that helped spark the Black Lives Matter movement.

“Am I next?” a caption asks, as Gauff slowly raises her face and hands to the camera. “This is why I am using my voice to fight against racism,” continues the caption, over a gallery of slain African Americans that also includes Breonna “I am using my voice,” the caption concludes, “Will you use yours?”

Gauff burst on the international tennis scene last year at Wimbledon where she came through qualifying and beat her idol Venus Williams in the first round before exiting in the round of 16.

Solid performances at the US Open and the Australian Open in January saw her crack the top 50 in the world rankings before she turned 16 on March 13.

She is among the many athletes to speak out in the wake of George’s death, a group that includes NBA superstar LeBron James and former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick — who was effectively ostracized from the NFL after his kneeling protests of racial injustice in 2016. —AFP

Roger Federer tops list of world’s highest-paid athletes

Portuguese football star Cristiano Ronaldo second on the list

NEW YORK: Roger Federer topped the 2020 Forbes magazine list of highest-paid global athletes announced Friday, leading the lineup for the first time with pre-tax earnings of \$106.3 million (95.5 million euros).

The Swiss tennis legend, a men’s record 20-time Grand Slam singles champion, becomes the first player from his sport atop the annual list since its 1990 debut, rising from fifth in 2019. Federer’s haul over the past 12 months included \$100 million from appearances fees and endorsement deals plus \$6.3 million in prize money. His previous best showing was second in 2013.

“His brand is pristine, which is why those that can afford to align with him clamor to do so,” University of Southern California sports business professor David Carter told the magazine.

The ongoing coronavirus pandemic that shut down sports worldwide caused the first decline since 2016 in the total income of the world’s 100 top-paid athletes, a 9% dip from last year to \$3.6 billion. Another plunge is expected next year from the shutdown.

Portuguese football star Cristiano Ronaldo was second on the list at \$105 million, \$60 million in salary and \$45 million from endorsements, with Argentine football hero Lionel Messi third on \$104 million, \$32 million of that from sponsorship deals.

Messi and Ronaldo, who have traded the top spot three of the past four years, saw their combined incomes dip \$28 million from last year due to salary cuts when European clubs halted play in March. Brazilian footballer Neymar was fourth overall on \$95.5 million, \$25 million from endorsements, while NBA star LeBron James of the Los Angeles Lakers was fifth on \$88.2 million, \$60 million of that from endorsements.

NBA star Stephen Curry of the Golden State Warriors was sixth on \$74.4 million with former teammate Kevin Durant next on \$63.9 million.

Tiger Woods, the reigning Masters champion and a 15-time major winner, was eighth on the list and tops among golfers at \$62.3 million, all but \$2.3 million from sponsor deals. Woods topped the Forbes list a record 12 times before an infidelity scandal helped end his run.

Two NFL quarterbacks rounded out the top 10 with Kirk Cousins ninth at \$60.5 million and Carson Wentz 10th on \$59.1 million. The top 100 featured athletes from 21 nations and 10 sports. More NBA players made the list than those from any other sport at 35, but 31 NFL players made the cut, up from 19 from last year, and they pulled down the most money of any league, aided by finishing the season before the deadly virus outbreak.

Major League Baseball, whose start to the 2020 campaign was postponed by the virus outbreak, put only one player on the list after 15 in 2019. The lone MLB player was Los Angeles Dodgers pitcher Clayton Kershaw, who was 57th at \$27.3 million with only \$750,000 from endorsements. Spanish footballer Carlos Ramos, the Real Madrid captain, was last among the 100 on \$21.8 million, including \$3 million in endorsements.

FEDERER PITCHMAN MAGIC

Two women, tennis stars Naomi Osaka of Japan and Serena Williams of the United States, made the list, the most females on it since 2016. Osaka ranked 29th overall on \$37.4 million (\$34 million in endorsements), four spots ahead of Williams with \$36 million (\$32 million in

endorsements). Federer, 38, boasts the biggest sponsorship lineup among active athletes with Moët & Chandon and Barilla among those paying from \$3 to \$30 million to link him with their brands.

Federer, who spent a record 310 weeks as world number one, reached 18 of 19 Grand Slam finals from 2005-2010.



CAPE TOWN: File photo taken on February 07, 2020 Switzerland’s Roger Federer reacts after his victory against Spain’s Rafael Nadal during their tennis match at The Match in Africa, in Cape Town. Roger Federer topped the 2020 Forbes magazine list of highest-paid global athletes announced May 29, 2020. —AFP

Only Woods has joined Federer in making \$100 million in sponsor deals in a single year.

Federer’s newest deal is with Swiss running shoe On, where he is an investor, but several sponsors have been with him for more than a decade, including Rolex, Credit Suisse, Mercedes-Benz and Wilson.

A split with Nike in 2018 opened Federer to Japanese apparel brand Uniqlo’s 10-year deal worth \$300 million. —AFP

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A split with Nike in 2018 opened Federer to Japanese apparel brand Uniqlo’s 10-year deal worth \$300 million. —AFP

Six talking points in Formula One

PARIS: Williams potentially up for sale, McLaren and Renault cutting staff and world champions Mercedes having to deny they are pondering a dramatic exit from Formula One.

All this and the season still hasn’t started yet. AFP Sport looks at the current state of Formula One:

WILLIAMS CONFIDENT OF FUTURE

• The likes of Nigel Mansell, Alain Prost and Damon Hill were all world champions behind the wheel of a Williams car. However, it’s 23 years since the British team last claimed the championship courtesy of Jacques Villeneuve, On Friday, and after two years of struggles, Williams said that they are considering selling up after a multi-million pound drop in the company’s financial results. The William Grand Prix Holdings group reported an adjusted loss of £13 million (\$15.9 million) for the year ending 2019.

After posting a £12.9 million profit in 2018, Williams have responded to the blow by seeking new investment. A minority or majority stake will be

offered to investors, along with the option for an outright buy-out. Deputy team principal Claire Williams insisted that the team will keep racing.

“I have every confidence we will find the investment we need,” she told the BBC. In 2019, Williams finished last in the championship, scoring just one point. Friday also saw them split with title sponsor Rokit.

RENAULT CUT BUT DON’T RUN

• Renault said they will continue to run an F1 team, despite announcing nearly 15,000 job losses in the wake of plummeting car sales. “We said publicly and we confirm that we intend to stay in Formula One,” said interim Renault chief Clotilde Delbos.

“The news about the new budget cap is very good for us, because we had less in this area than some of our competitors which were spending a lot of money.” Renault were fourth in the constructors standings in 2018 but slipped back to fifth last year.

MCLAREN SCALE BACK

• The McLaren group is cutting 1,200 jobs and significantly scaling down its racing division after the coronavirus crisis hit sales. The restructuring affects over a quarter of the company’s 4,000 jobs with executive chairman Paul Walsh warning the cuts

“will have a significant impact on the shape and size of our F1 team”.

British media reports said about 70 of the racing team’s 800 jobs will be eliminated. McLaren, the second-oldest team on the grid, have won 12 drivers’ titles — including with racing legends Alain Prost and the late Ayrton Senna — and the constructors’ championship on eight occasions.

They were fourth in the constructors in 2019 with Carlos Sainz, bound for Ferrari in 2021 to replace four-time world champion Sebastian Vettel, taking a creditable sixth in the drivers standings.

SPENDING CAPPED

• Spending by teams will be capped at \$145 million in 2021 with a subsequent limit of \$135m by 2023 as the sport’s rulers attempt to stem the bleeding from the coronavirus pandemic. Before the pandemic struck, a spending cap of \$175m was set to be introduced next year in a bid to help even up the competition.

As well as a budget cap, the FIA also agreed to a host of changes to technical and sporting regulations. The most significant of these is the introduction of a handicap system for aerodynamic development, also set for 2021. “Formula 1 wins,” said Zak Brown, the chief executive of cash-strapped McLaren.

MERCEDES STAYING PUT

• World champions Mercedes’ parent company Daimler rejected reports that they could quit the sport. “Speculation regarding a potential withdrawal from Formula 1 continues to be unfounded and irresponsible,” a Daimler statement said.

“The sport has taken the right measures to address the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic and its future financial sustainability, and we welcome these steps. “It is our clear intention to continue competing in Formula 1.”

Mercedes have won the drivers’ and constructors’ championships in each of the past six seasons. Last year, they captured 15 of the 21 races as Lewis Hamilton romped to a sixth world title.

NOW, WHAT ABOUT THE RACING?

• The 2020 season has been in cold storage ever since the chaotic retreat from the proposed season opener in Australia in March. Cancellations and postponements have piled up but F1 hopes to get the season started with back-to-back races in Austria on July 5 and 12.

However, Silverstone’s hopes of also staging two races are on a knife-edge after the British government said they intended to introduce a two-week quarantine for all visitors to the UK from mid-June. —AFP

Sports

Havertz fires Leverkusen third with Freiburg winner

Spanish La Liga confirm season will resume on June 11

BERLIN: Exciting youngster Kai Havertz broke another Bundesliga record on Friday after scoring the winner in a 1-0 victory at Freiburg which moved Bayer Leverkusen into third place.

Havertz, 20, became the first player in the history of the league to reach 35 goals before turning 21 years old eight minutes after the break, when he combined with Leon Bailey before squeezing home under intense pressure from Dominique Heintz.

The dynamic German was already the youngest player to reach 50 and 100 appearances in the German top flight and became the youngest ever player to score a league goal for Leverkusen in 2017.

Havertz's goal was his fifth in his four appearances since the Bundesliga returned from its coronavirus-enforced break and puts Leverkusen a point ahead of fourth-placed RB Leipzig, who travel to Cologne on Monday night.

They are also three points ahead of Borussia Moenchengladbach in fifth ahead of their match with Union Berlin today.

Havertz's goal was the first shot on target in a largely drab encounter in which Freiburg could have snatched at least a point. Lucas Hoeler missed a glaring opportunity for the hosts two minutes before the break, pushing wide when sent through one-on-one with Leverkusen stopper Lukas Hradecky.

And chasing an equaliser late on, Nils Petersen forced Hradecky to save the three points for Leverkusen with a fine first time strike that the goalkeeper did well to tip away.

Meanwhile, the Spanish league season will resume after a three-month coronavirus lockdown on June 11 with the Seville derby, and the 2020-2021 season will start on September 12, the Spanish Sports Council confirmed on Friday.

The council released a statement saying that the Spanish Football Federation (RFEF) and La Liga had agreed the format for the 11 remaining rounds in the top two Spanish divisions.

It said the season should be completed by July 19, "depending on the evolution of the pandemic." Competition will kick off on Thursday, June 11 when Betis play Sevilla. The rest of the league return to action on the weekend of June 13 and 14.

Earlier on Friday, Javier Tebas, the league president told Marca: "The important thing will be to know the end date of the 2019-20 season. The next one will start on September 12."

The Spanish government last week gave La Liga the green light to resume from the week beginning June 8.

"More than 130 people are currently working so that everything can be done in a new format: the travel, the organisation, everything," said Tebas.

The German Bundesliga has already played three rounds following its restart earlier this month, while the English Premier League and Italy's Serie A are also set to return in mid-June.

But the top-flight seasons in France, Belgium and the Netherlands have all been ended. Barcelona led Real Madrid by two points at the top of the table when La Liga was halted in March.

Tebas also said that television viewers would be



FREIBURG: Leverkusen's German midfielder Kai Havertz (R) and Freiburg's German defender Dominique Heintz vie for the ball during the German first division Bundesliga football match SC Freiburg v Bayer 04 Leverkusen on May 29, 2020 in Freiburg. —AFP

able to choose whether to watch matches, which will all be played behind closed doors, with virtual sound effects added, an option that has caused debate among fans since the Bundesliga resumed.

He said that he was taking part in a demonstration of the technology on Friday evening and that Javier Guillen, the director of the Tour of Spain, and

Carmelo Ezpeleta, the boss of Dorna Sports, promoter of the MotoGP championship had also been invited.

"We want to offer an alternative for the fans - silence, or the virtualisation of the stands. The tests I have seen are interesting, but there will be both options," said Tebas. —AFP

Jazz end Blazer5's unbeaten NBA 2K League start

LOS ANGELES: Kimanni "Splashy" Ingram averaged 27 points as Jazz Gaming swept previously unbeaten Blazer5 Gaming on Friday in NBA 2K League action.

In other matches as Week 4 concluded, Mavs Gaming ruined NetsGC's season opener with a 2-0 series win. Pacers Gaming defeated Pistons GT 2-0, and Knicks Gaming rallied past Cavs Legion GC 2-1.

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 Jazz (2-1) pulled off the surprise of the night against Blazer5 (4-1). Splashy scored 28 points and handed out nine assists as the Jazz took the opener 70-61. Spencer "Ria" Wyman contributed 12 points and 14 rebounds for the Jazz. Nidal "Mama Im Dat Man" Nasser had 22 points and eight assists for Blazer5, who got 15 points and 17 boards from Dayne "OneWildWalnut" Downey.

Splashy's 26 points and six assists were team highs as the Jazz sealed the series with a 69-66 win. Lytel "Lotty" Martin had 19 points for the Jazz, and Ria finished with 16 points and eight rebounds. Mama Im Dat Man had 35 points and 11

assists, and OneWildWalnut racked up 10 points and 12 rebounds.

"That all we can ask for," Ria, the No. 1 overall pick in 2019 NBA 2K League draft, said of the victory. "We dropped one vs. the Kings yesterday, and we had to bounce back. This was a must win for us, and that's what we went out and did. ...

"To be honest, this is what I've been waiting for, an opportunity to do what I got drafted for. I got drafted off of ... dominating people in the paint, so when I'm able to get the ball down low and have an opportunity to score, ... it's helping my team out, as you can see from the Blazer5 series."

Regarding the Jazz's prospects this season, Ria said, "We're a wild card. On any night, my backcourt can give us 60 (points), I can give us 30, Shaka ("Yeah I Compete" Browne) can get you a bucket out of the post. He's just playing amazing defense. This is one of the best teams I've ever played for. ... This is just fun, man. I love this."

Justin "Sherm" Sherman scored 30 points and recorded nine assists as the Mavs posted a 71-67 win over the Nets in their series' first game. Peter "PeteBeBallin" Malin added 11 points and 15 rebounds for the Mavs. Josh "Choc" Humphries had 34 points and nine assists while Aziz "Shuttles" Salem put up 14 points and 10 rebounds for the Nets, who became the last of the 23 NBA 2K League teams to start their season.

The Mavs sealed the sweep with a 64-58 victory behind 20 points and 16 rebounds from PeteBeBallin. Choc put up 37 points in the defeat.

Nicolas "Swizurk" Grech's 29-point effort powered the Pacers to a 79-58 opening win against the Pistons. Two Pacers produced double-doubles: Eddy "BOHIO" Perez (13 points, 11 assists) and Jomar "Jomar" Varela-Escapa (10 points, 16 rebounds). Cody "LYKaPRO" Hart led the Pistons with 18 points, and Joseph "Joseph" Marrero had 16



SALT LAKE CITY: File photo shows, Donovan Mitchell #31 of the Utah Jazz shoots the ball against the Philadelphia 76ers on November 6, 2019 at vivint.SmartHome Arena in Salt Lake City, Utah. —AFP

points and 19 boards.

The Pacers sealed the match with a 64-52 decision, with BOHIO scoring 31 points. Joseph gave the Pistons 17 points and 14 rebounds.

The Knicks took the decisive third game against the Cavs 64-55, getting 24 points from Christopher "Duck" Charles as well as 12 points and 11 rebounds from Robert "CantGuardRob" Nastasi. William "Strainer" Morales paced the Cavs with 34 points, and Timothy "oLARRY" Anselmo piled up 12 points and 14 boards.

The Cavs won the opener 80-61 as Strainer poured in 41 points and oLARRY amassed 13 points and 11 rebounds. Duck scored 28 points.

The Knicks leveled the series with a 67-55 triumph. Malik "OriginalMalik" Hobson had 27 points and eight assists for the Knicks, and CantGuardRob contributed 16 points and 13 rebounds. Strainer and oLARRY each scored 23 points for the Cavs, and oLARRY added 15 rebounds. —Reuters

European soccer's return to action after coronavirus

BERN: Professional soccer leagues around Europe are gearing up for a return to action following the novel coronavirus stoppage, but some are more advanced than others. Here is a roundup of the state of play:

GERMANY

The Bundesliga restarted on May 16, games played without fans and with a strict health protocol in place. The German Cup semi-finals will be played on June 9 and 10, with the final scheduled for July 4.

ENGLAND

The Premier League season will restart on June 17 with games between Aston Villa and Sheffield United, and Manchester City and Arsenal. A full fixture list will be played on the weekend of June 19-21. All games will be played without fans in attendance.

SPAIN

La Liga will resume on June 11 with the local derby between Sevilla and Real Betis, the government's department for sport (CSD) has said.

ITALY

Italy's sports minister Vincenzo Spadafora said the country's top-flight league has been given the go-ahead to restart on June 20. The resumption of the league could be preceded by Italian Cup matches one week earlier.

FRANCE

The season was called off by the government and Paris St Germain champions. Olympique Lyonnais said they would claim damages after they were denied a European spot. Relegated Amiens and Toulouse also threatened to initiate legal action.

ALBANIA

Albania's federation said the top-flight league would begin on June 3. The Albanian Cup final will take place on Aug. 2.

ANDORRA

All league matches were postponed on March 8. The intention is for the season to be completed as planned.

ARMENIA

Armenian Premier League resumed on May 23.

AUSTRIA

The Austrian Bundesliga will resume on June 2 with matches played every three days. The Austrian Cup final will be played on May 29.

AZERBAIJAN

The Azerbaijan Premier League had planned for a resumption of the competition a few weeks after the current lockdown ended. The government, however, extended the lockdown until May 31, making any return to action impossible before June.

BELARUS

Belarus was the only country in Europe playing soccer amid the coronavirus pandemic. The country's football federation postponed one Belarusian Premier League match scheduled on May 15, and one first division (second-tier) game scheduled on May 16 due to suspected COVID-19 cases.

BELGIUM

Belgium was the first country to cancel the rest of its season. Club Brugge were formally declared champions on May 15. Runners-up Gent will compete in the preliminary rounds of the 2020-21 Champions League while Sporting Charleroi, Royal Antwerp and Standard Liege all qualify for the Europa League.

BOSNIA

The Bosnian Football Association hopes to resume the country's 12-team first division no later than June 13.

BULGARIA

Bulgaria's top division will resume on June 5 without spectators in a shortened format and end on July 11, the country's football union said. The Bulgarian Cup final will take place on July 4, and the following campaign will start on July 25, three days after the domestic Super Cup. The remainder of the second division season has been cancelled, with leaders CSKA 1948 declared champions.

CROATIA

Croatia's domestic season will resume with cup ties on May 30 followed by league action on June 5.

CZECH REPUBLIC

The top two leagues in the Czech Republic resumed on May 23. The plan is for two games to be played per week and the season to be completed by July 18. Teplice beat Slovan Liberec 2-0 in a match that included pre-kickoff temperature checks and other protective measures.

CYPRUS

Cyprus' soccer federation has called off the season after its set of health protocols were rejected by medical experts.

England want ICC to allow substitutes

LONDON: The England and Wales Cricket Board is in talks with the International Cricket Council (ICC) about allowing coronavirus player substitutions in its upcoming planned test series against West Indies and Pakistan, an ECB official said.

ECB director of events Steve Elworthy was quoted in British media on Friday saying he hoped an agreement would be reached in time for those test matches, which the ECB plans to hold in "bio-secure" venues in July.

The ICC currently only allows a player to be replaced during a match because of concussion. Under the proposed change, a late substitution would also be allowed on coronavirus grounds. Media reports did not specify how the procedure would work, including whether it would involve testing players.

"I know there are still some considerations from an ICC perspective about a Covid-19 replacement," Elworthy told British media. "That still needs to be agreed."

"This is specifically for Test cricket, and we would hope that would be in place well before the test series starts in July."

Keeping players' wellbeing in mind, the ICC Cricket Committee has already recommended banning the use of saliva to shine the ball in order to generate swing.

Cricket West Indies (CWI) gave its approval in principle on Friday for the series in England which was originally scheduled in June.

While cricket in England remains suspended until July 1, a group of 55 cricketers have been asked to return to training to prepare for the start of the English summer season.

Earlier, West Indies cricket chiefs on Friday gave their approval to a Test tour of England where the team will stay in a "bio-secure environment."

The Windies were due to play three Tests in England in June but the threat of the coronavirus has pushed the visit back to July at the earliest.

"The Cricket West Indies (CWI) board gave approval in principle for the proposed upcoming West Indies Test tour of England," said a CWI statement.

"The decision comes only after CWI medical and cricket-related representatives and advisors have been involved in detailed discussions with the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB), and their own medical and public health advisers."

It added: "CWI has also received and reviewed detailed plans for players and staff to be kept in a bio-secure environment for the duration of the tour, with all matches being played behind closed doors."

The ECB has proposed the Tests will start on July 8, 16 and 24 at Hampshire's Ageas Bowl and Lancashire's Old Trafford. Both those venues have on-site hotels.

Meanwhile, the CWI said the touring party will use private charter planes while medical screenings and individual COVID-19 testing will take place for all players and staff. —Agencies

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Red Star crowned champions

Fans could return for 20-21 season: Premier League chief



BELGRADE: Red Star Belgrade players celebrate their third successive and record-extending 31st league title after the football match between FC Rad and FC Crvena Zvezda (FC Red Star) at the "King Petar I" stadium in Belgrade on May 29, 2020, as Serbia's first and second division resumed today behind closed doors, after it was stopped due to the COVID-19 pandemic in mid-March. — AFP

BELGRADE: Red Star Belgrade clinched their third successive and a record-extending 31st league title with a 5-0 win at city rivals Rad on Friday as Serbia's first division resumed after it was halted due to the COVID-19 pandemic in mid-March.

Celebrations were muted, however, as the game was played behind closed doors and the 1991 European Cup winners, who won the continent's elite club competition on this day 29 years ago, were unable to share their joy with the fans.

With three rounds of matches remaining, Red Star have 72 points from 27 games, 14 more than closest rivals Partizan Belgrade who are at home to Mladost Lucani on Saturday.

Up to 1,000 fans will be allowed to attend games as of next weekend when Red Star are at home to Radnik Surdulica, with the Serbian government continuing to ease lockdown measures.

Second-bottom Rad were on the back foot throughout and fell behind in the 24th minute, when Mirko Ivanic converted a penalty after Aleksa Vukanovic was fouled just inside the area.

Centre back Srdjan Babic doubled Red Star's lead in the 30th from close range after a nicely-executed set piece and Vukanovic added the third six minutes

later with a crisp shot into the far corner from 10 metres. Australia defender Milos Degenek headed in the fourth from an El Fardou Ben Nabouhane corner in the 57th minute before the lively Vukanovic tapped in Ivanic's fizzing low cross in the closing stages.

Red Star's head coach and the club's former international midfielder Dejan Stankovic, who won the 2010 Champions League with Inter Milan, was delighted.

"All credit goes to the players, the staff and the fans, who put wind in our sails every step of the way," Stankovic told Arenasport television. "We'll have some champagne tonight, we've earned it."

Meanwhile, Premier League chief executive Richard Masters said on Friday that fans could be allowed to attend top-flight matches in the 2020-21 season on a "phased basis".

The Premier League plans to resume the 2019-20 campaign on June 17 following the coronavirus lockdown. But the remaining 92 fixtures will be played behind closed doors to minimise the health risks of

football's return in a country badly hit by the pandemic. The prospect of playing the next season with no fans is unappetising for the Premier League and Masters suggested it could be possible to bring back supporters at some stage.

"No one knows when matches will move away from the behind-closed-doors model and it is right to have contingency plans in place, but there is optimism at the Premier League and at clubs that we will see fans back in the stadiums next season and it may happen on a phased basis," Masters told Sky Sports News.

"Hopefully it will be a huge morale boost and that is what we've been working towards. 'We've got some incredible fans in this country and we all know the Premier League as we know and love it won't be fully back until we have fans back through the turnstiles.' The biggest concern for 'Project Restart' is another wave of the virus, which could lead to the competition being suspended again. With that in mind, Masters said it was crucial clubs agreed on a

plan for what would happen if the season had to end early before games resume.

But he would not be drawn on whether an un-weighted points-per-game model would be used in decide the final table in the event of the season being abandoned. "We need to have plans in place so that we go into the start of the season knowing that if it can't be completed, what then happens," Masters said. "(But) I'm not going to give away any of the details of the private discussions we are having with our clubs." The video assistant referee (VAR) system is set to be used in the remaining matches, but Masters said it would be done remotely rather than from the officials' usual base at Stockley Park.

"VAR has its own social distancing issues but we think there is a way of completing the season with VAR, so absolutely our intention is to complete the season with VAR in place," he said.

"The hub itself could be a problem, so if you can't do the hub you have to do it remotely, and that's what we're looking at."

Liverpool are two wins away from clinching their first English title for 30 years, but they could be forced to play at a neutral venue when the trophy is within reach on police advice.—Agencies

Klopp wants supporters to be 'stay at home fans'

LONDON: Jurgen Klopp wants Liverpool supporters to prove themselves the best "stay at home fans in the world" after English police said Friday they wanted any potential Premier League title-clincher for the Reds played at a neutral venue in a bid to avoid a mass gathering outside Anfield.

Premier League chiefs have set June 17 as the date for the top flight to restart following the coronavirus delay. They hope to play the majority of the matches behind closed doors on a home and away basis at clubs' usual stadiums.

However, police are concerned about the issue of

hardcore fans potentially flouting social distancing rules by congregating wherever their team play and want several fixtures, including Manchester City and Manchester United games not involving Liverpool, played at neutral venues.

Liverpool are two wins away from sealing their first English title for 30 years. The Reds could be crowned champions as early as the first weekend of the restart if Manchester City lose to Arsenal and they beat Everton in a Merseyside derby.

"I heard a few days ago a really good phrase about how we have the best home fans in the world, so we should maybe now say the best stay at home fans in the world," Klopp told beIN SPORTS' Keys & Gray Show, which is available on YouTube.

"Now we are really desperate to become champions on the pitch and it looks like we can do that wherever it will be," the German boss added.

"We hope it will be at Anfield but we don't know, and that's not important. "Most of the people on this

planet have never had a chance in the life to become champion of the Premier League, for us it looks like that we have that chance. So we take it.

"However, there will be a moment in our life when we have time and the opportunity and it's allowed again to celebrate together."

Klopp insisted winning the title in an empty stadium would still be an "absolutely exceptional day in my life". "It's not perfect, but we know for a while and it will not be perfect but we are already used to that." Earlier on Friday, police said they had reached a consensus with the Premier League that "balances the needs of football, while also minimising the demand on policing".

"The majority of remaining matches will be played, at home and away as scheduled, with a small number of fixtures taking place at neutral venues, which, contrary to some reports, have yet to be agreed," said Mark Roberts, the Deputy Chief Constable Mark Roberts of South Yorkshire Police

"The Premier League's ambition is to complete



Serbian league restarts