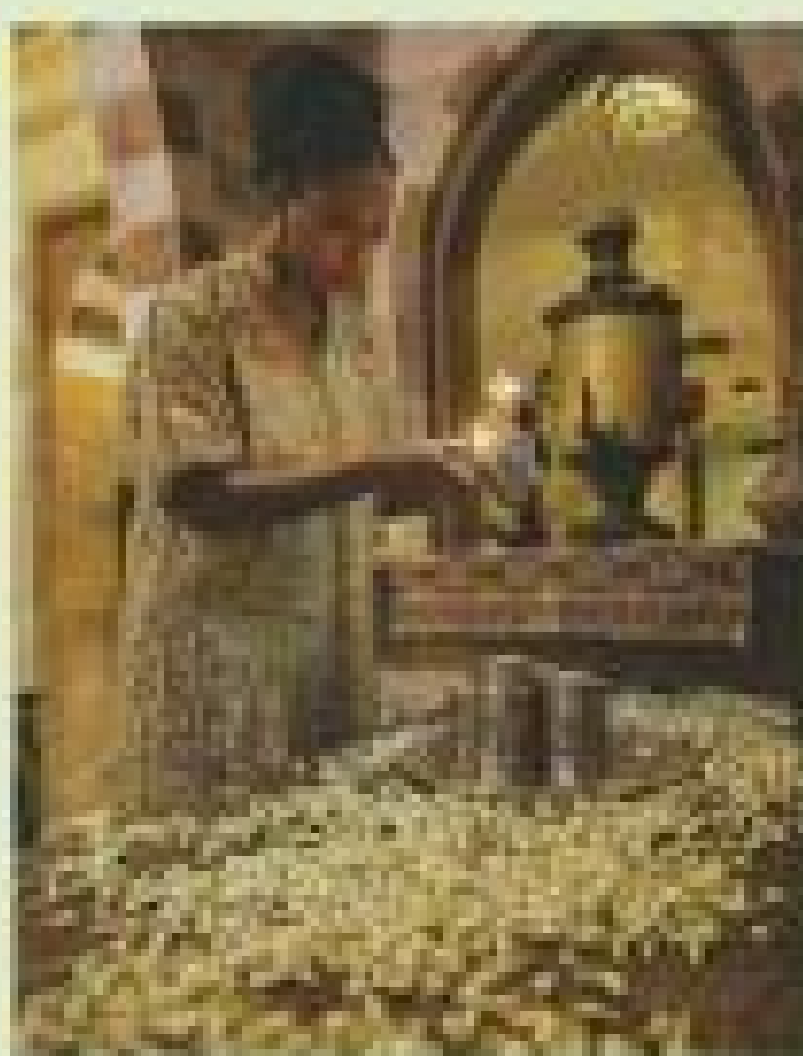


OPINION
US, IRAN SHOULD
HEED CALL
FOR CHANGE
IN DIPLOMATIC
MOOD
By Alistair Burt
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SAUDI ARABIA
EXPATS CHOOSE
KINGDOM OVER HOME
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& FINALLY
FASHION STARS
ARE MASTERING
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ARAB NEWS

The Voice of a Changing Region

Since 1975

Stay home to beat virus

A volunteer in Chennai holds a placard to raise awareness about the coronavirus during an India-wide lockdown as a preventive measure against COVID-19.

AFP

Detailed coverage
Pages 3 to 13



'VIRTUAL' MEETING

Oil giants are far apart on eve of crucial output talks

Saudi Arabia, Russia believe deal can be done but 'significant bridges' must be crossed

Frank Kane Dubai

Big oil producers are divided over the way forward on the eve of two days of "virtual" talks aimed at rebalancing the global market.

Industry sources in Saudi Arabia and Russia told Arab News on Tuesday they were still hopeful of an agreement to cut oil output at a meeting on Thursday of OPEC and non-OPEC members, the so-called OPEC+ group.

But they said issues remained to be resolved, and a full agreement may be delayed until after Friday's meeting of G20 energy ministers under the Saudi presidency.

The oil price, which has rebounded from lows this week after the in-

tervention of US President Donald Trump, gave few clues to the market's view. Trading in Brent crude, the Middle East benchmark, was quiet until a late surge of nearly 4 percent to nearly \$34 a barrel.

Trump has said he "expected" cuts in oil output of up to 15 million barrels a day, but most experts believe that is impossible, even if US producers join in.

Reports from Moscow suggested Russia was considering cuts of 1.6 million barrels a day, but President Vladimir Putin's spokesman said there were significant differences to be bridged before a deal could be done, especially with regard to US involvement.

"There are different concepts and they cannot be equated," he said. "The natural decline in US oil



Trump has made a big mistake by blaming Saudi Arabia and Russia.

Anas Al-Hajji
managing partner of
Energy Outlook Advisers

Make or break
days for global oil
Page 11

production cannot be compared with reductions to stabilize oil markets," US producers have slashed capital expenditure and oil output in the face of plunging global demand.

The Texas oil and gas regulator, Ryan Sitton, said US producers were likely to "organically" cut 4 million barrels of oil per day over the next three months, but cuts of 20 million barrels were needed from OPEC+ countries. Industry experts said this was unlikely.

"Trump has made a big mistake by blaming Saudi Arabia and Russia. He will be shocked when oil prices remain low even if we have a 10 million barrel cut," said Anas Al-Hajji, managing partner of Texas oil consultancy Energy Outlook Advisers.

JP Morgan, the big US bank with a long-standing relationship with Saudi Arabia, said the most it expected from the OPEC+ talks was a commitment to cut 4.3 million barrels a day.

"The Saudis want to keep pressure on oil prices in order to gain a larger market share and concessions from Washington," the bank said.

Influential energy expert Daniel Yergin predicted cuts of 10 million barrels, including America's "natural decline."

"The collapse in world oil demand and low prices are driving large spending cuts among oil companies around the world. The largest cuts in percentage terms so far are coming from north America," he said.

COVID-19: 100 days that changed world

FAISAL J. ABBAS | EDITOR IN CHIEF

On Tuesday it was 100 days since the World Health Organization (WHO) was informed of a cluster of cases of pneumonia, of unknown cause, in Wuhan city, China. As we raised Christmas toasts and counted down to the New Year fireworks, no one could have imagined that a tiny thing, invisible to the naked eye, would bring the world to a halt and turn our lives upside down.

This "thing" did not even have a name until Feb. 12, when the WHO defined it as "severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2," or SARS-CoV-2.

These first 100 days have felt like 100 months, but in fact we are still in the first five minutes of the first half of an uneven battle against COVID-19, the disease the virus causes; and the longer this game of elimination lasts, the more injuries our team will suffer and the harder it becomes to cut our losses.

Officially the virus has infected nearly 1.5 million people worldwide and killed more than 85,000. Too many countries are testing too few people, so the true figures will be higher.

The International Labour Organization believes the virus could wipe out 195 million jobs in the next three months; added to collapses in stock markets and the price of oil, the global economy will take years to recover.

The social side effects of our new reality will last for a long time, if not forever. As each day passes without a cure or vaccine, the negative effects will be exacerbated in ways that we will find difficult to comprehend, thus prolonging the period needed for life to return to normal.

100 days ago ... we refused to shake hands with those we disliked and embraced those we loved. In the new reality, the opposite may be true.

100 days ago ... you could be out of an airport in under 15 minutes if you had no baggage. Today you will be in quarantine for 14 days before you reach your final destination, if you are allowed to travel at all.

100 days ago ... masked men attracted the attention of the police and security services. Now it is the unmasked who do so. Medical masks are bulletproof vests, every person who sneezes a potential terrorist, shooting indiscriminately.

100 days ago ... preventing people from entering places of worship would have been a flagrant violation of human rights. Now clergy of all faiths urge worshippers to pray in their own homes.

100 days ago ... we were suspicious of digital tracking by "Big Brother" and staying at home was a punishment. Now we voluntarily supply all our geophysical data so that health authorities can predict the next virus hotspot and establish whether we have come in contact with an infected person.

Is there a solution to all this? Surely. However, the question is not whether there is a solution, but when — and how much it will cost in lives, money and freedoms before the world emerges from this dark tunnel.

The veteran US diplomat Henry Kissinger tackled these issues in an article for the Wall Street Journal. He called on his country's leadership to lead the world in this battle against coronavirus in three domains: First, shore up scientific efforts and competencies to find a medical solution; second, strive to heal the wounds to the world economy; third, safeguard the principles of the liberal world order.

Of course, that is all easier said than done, especially when politics interfere, and states succumb to the temptation to put themselves first and the world second. The spat between the US and China over the WHO's supposed pro-Beijing bias, and allegations of a virus cover-up by China, are evidence of this. The seizure by some countries of shipments of medical equipment on the way to other countries is more.

Meanwhile more than half the world is under lockdown. When will it end? When can we go back to seeing our friends and family? Some studies suggest the end of summer in countries the pandemic reached in mid-March, but the truth is they are guesswork.

In the absence of "science fact," there is always science fiction. The events we are enduring bear an uncanny similarity to those in the 2011 Steven Soderbergh movie "Contagion" — which means it will take at least a year for the world to find a vaccine and for life to get back to normal!



This 'thing' did not even have a name until Feb. 12, when the WHO defined it as SARS-CoV-2.

Reasons to be cheerful

A DAILY VIRUS ANTIDOTE

Not to be outdone by Dior, Louis Vuitton is converting five of its French workshops, which usually turn out designer clothes and luxury leather goods, to make hundreds of thousands of protective masks for frontline health workers. Dior is already making masks for hospital staff. Both brands are owned by LVMH, whose boss Bernard Arnault last month ordered perfumers that make fragrances for Dior, Guerlain and Givenchy to switch production to hand sanitizer gel to be distributed free to French hospitals.

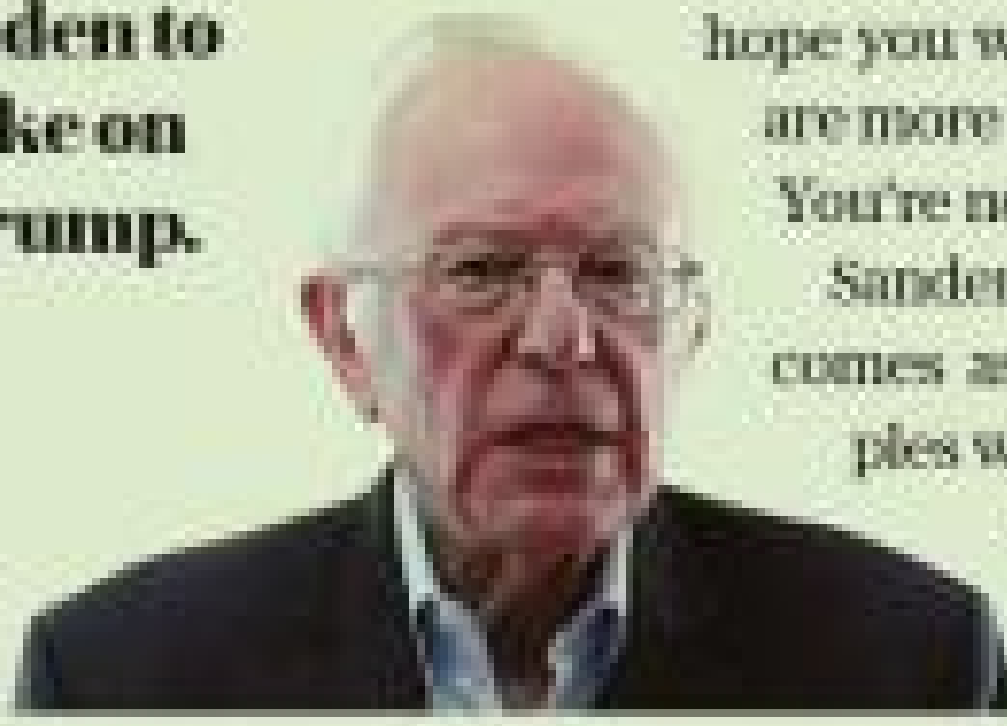
Reuters Washington

Veteran socialist Bernie Sanders abandoned his bid for the White House on Tuesday, clearing the way for former Vice President Joe Biden to challenge Donald Trump in November's presidential election.

Sanders admitted he no longer had a viable path to the Democratic nomination and promised to work with Biden to take on Trump.

"Together, standing united, we will go forward to defeat Donald Trump, the most dangerous president in modern American history," he said. Sanders, 78, a US senator from Vermont, was an early front-runner in the Democratic race be-

Sanders said he no longer had a viable path to the Democratic nomination and vowed to work with Biden to take on Trump.



fore losing in South Carolina in late February as moderate Democrats united behind Biden.

Biden praised Sanders and promised his ideas would be incorporated into his White House run. He told Sanders' supporters: "I see you, I hear you, and I understand the urgency of what it is we have to get done in this country. I hope you will join us. You are more than welcome. You're needed."

Sanders' withdrawal comes as the US grapples with a coronavirus outbreak that upended the pri-

mary schedule and may threaten the presidential election itself. Some allies had encouraged Sanders to stay in the race to influence Biden's policy positions, but the virus crisis shifted public focus away from the campaign. With all rallies canceled, Sanders had little opportunity to get his message across.

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Twitter: @FaisalJAbbas

The need for interfaith partnership will continue beyond this crisis, and that is why we continue to work hard to build more bridges of understanding and cooperation.

Dr. Mohammed bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa
Secretary-general, Muslim World League



Radars

COVID-19 Advisory

It is a new coronavirus and cases first appeared in the Chinese city of Wuhan, in the form of acute pneumonia.

Symptoms

Symptoms may appear within 2-14 days of exposure to the virus



Sore throat



Shortness of breath



Cough



Fever

Preventive methods



Wash your hands frequently with soap



Avoid crowded areas



Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth



Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces



Avoid approaching people having signs of a cold, flu or cough



Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash

The Register

THE PICTURES THAT MARK THE DAY



Yahya bin Abdullah Al-Samaan, assistant speaker of the Saudi Shoura Council, addresses the 33rd ordinary session in Riyadh on Wednesday. SPA.

The Saudi Shoura Council on Wednesday urged the setting up of a special program to prepare experts from the Kingdom to take up top human rights roles within the UN.

During the council's 33rd ordinary session, chaired by its assistant speaker Yahya bin Abdullah Al-Samaan, delegates called on the Saudi Human Rights Commission (HRC) to cooperate with the relevant authorities to establish a qualifying program to ready Saudis specialized in human rights to become the country's representatives at the UN on the issue.

The meeting also asked the HRC to

create a database and produce annual statistics relating to human rights conditions in the Kingdom, in accordance with international standards.

Shoura Council members pointed out that systems would need to be put in place to measure quality standards and progress toward implementing the UN's sustainable development plan for 2030.

In addition, the HRC was requested to oversee the launch of community awareness programs to help curb incidents of violence, especially against women and children.

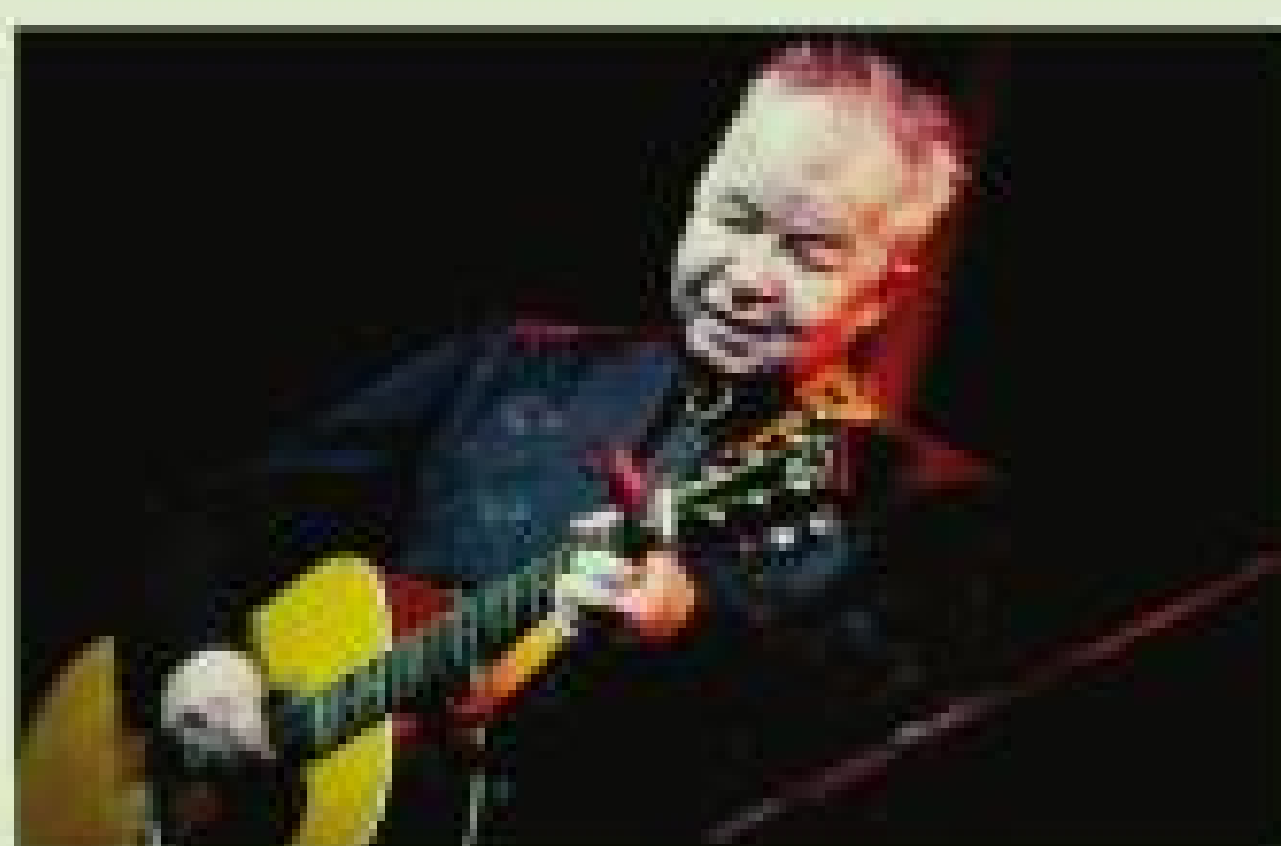
On other matters, the council

demand that the Saudi Ministry of Transport work with the relevant authorities to improve, where necessary, road services while also drawing up a plan to provide integrated services for users of all the Kingdom's highways.

It also urged the Agricultural Development Fund (ADF) to investigate ways of attracting investment in the aquaculture industry, and projects to manufacture agricultural products. The council decided that a comprehensive ADF plan was also needed to help hit sustainable agricultural rural development program funding targets.

What's Trending

Today's hot topics explained by Nada Jan



DEMISE

John Prine

American singer-songwriter John Prine died late on Tuesday having contracted the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). He was 73.

According to his wife and manager Fiona Whelan Prine, the country artist was admitted to hospital in Nashville on March 26 after displaying symptoms of COVID-19.

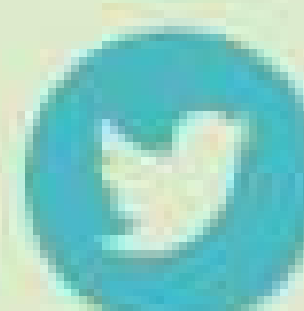
Many artists paid tribute to the passing of "one of America's greatest songwriters."

The Recording Academy said in a statement: "We join the world in mourning the passing of revered country and folk singer-songwriter John Prine. Widely lauded as one of the most influential songwriters of his generation, John's impact will continue to inspire musicians for years to come. We send our deepest condolences to his loved ones."

Prine made his debut in the early 1970s, and became widely known after Bette Midler, Joan Baez, Bonnie Raitt and The Everly Brothers released cover versions of his songs.

MUSIC

#Midnight



British singer Liam Payne released a collaboration with Swedish DJ Alesso — "Midnight" — on Wednesday. Payne and Alesso announced the new song on their Twitter accounts.

"Fall into #Midnight with @Alesso and I as the track is officially out! Chill with whoever you're with and listen now," Payne tweeted.

"One of my favorite songs I've ever made is out!!! 'Midnight' has been helping me get through these weird times. @LiamPayne and I hope it does the same for you!," Alesso tweeted.

Fans took to Twitter to support the new song, and the hashtag #Midnight was trending worldwide, much to Payne's delight.

"Amazing to see all of you supporting mine and @Alesso's new song #Midnight and getting it to trend worldwide! You are the best," Payne tweeted.

@Bendtheheartbk tweeted: "You deserve all my love

and support so much I love you @LiamPayne #Midnight proud of you."

@Trish_Vp tweeted: "#Midnight @LiamPayne Seriously this song is so perfect, Well in itself the entire album is perfect."

@zmkwiw tweeted: "Congrats @LiamPayne . So PROUD of you Liam. Let the haters say what they wanna, they are just jealous of you touching the sky. Your fans are here, we love you and will support you forever. #Midnight"

@liamssmarvel tweeted: "Anyways I'll be listening to this song forever because it's a MASTERPIECE. #Midnight"

@itsdeniseplano said: "Midnight by Payne and Alesso is my summer hit!"

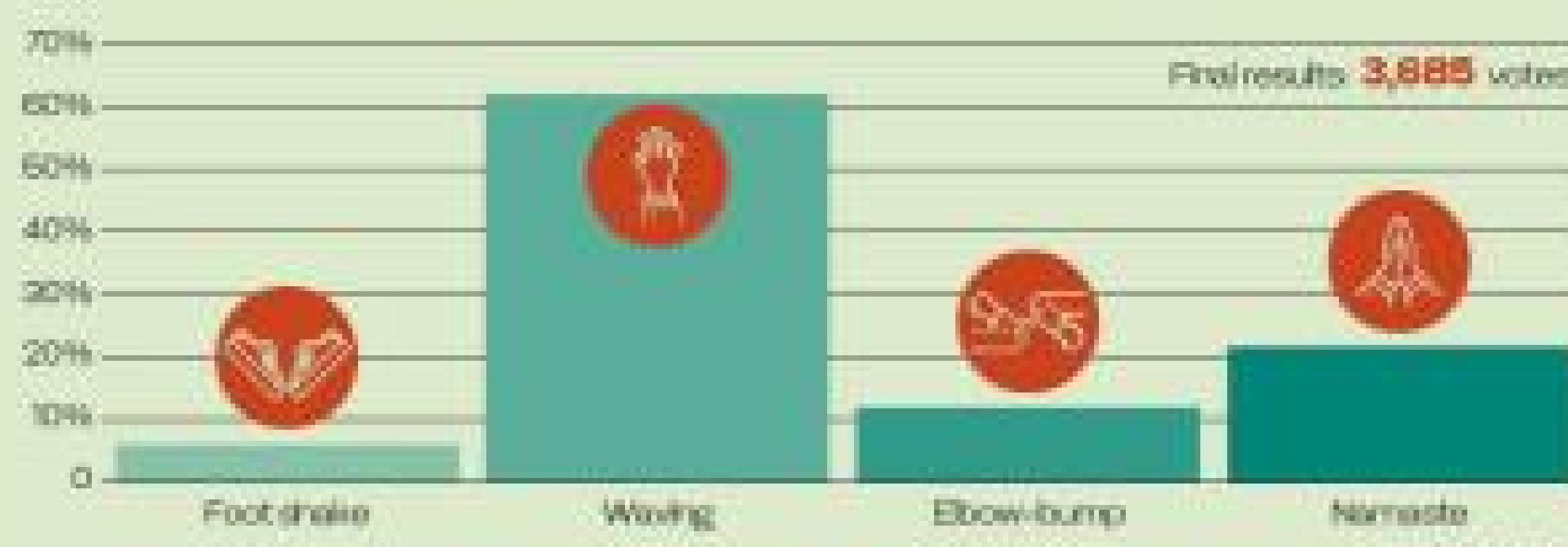
@liamabeathoxx tweeted: "The song is a masterpiece, the artist is a masterpiece. What else could you possibly want? Thanks for bringing some light in these very dark days @LiamPayne #Midnight"



Twitter Poll

A recent Arab News Twitter poll revealed nearly 62% people preferred waving as means of greeting.

WHAT IS YOUR PREFERRED #CORONAVIRUS - PROOF ALTERNATIVE TO SHAKING HANDS HANDSHAKE ?



Prayer Times in Saudi Arabia

April 9	Fajr	Sunrise	Dhuhr	Asr	Maghreb	Isha
Makkah	4:49	6:06	12:23	3:48	6:39	8:09
Madinah	4:45	6:05	12:23	3:52	6:42	8:12
Riyadh	4:37	5:36	11:58	3:24	6:14	7:44
Abha	4:42	5:57	12:12	3:33	6:26	7:56
Dammam	4:00	5:21	11:42	3:12	6:01	7:31

Spotlight

Over the decades, carrom became an important part of Saudi social life, featuring in family events and gatherings.



For many Saudi families, there is no better way to stay entertained during the time of coronavirus lockdowns than by playing a board game that both young and old enjoy.
Photo by Rashid (@rashid2)

CORONAVIRUS

When the chips are down

Carrom playing, an age-old pastime, is helping families in Saudi Arabia keep the lockdown blues at bay

Asseel Bashraheel Jeddah
Ruba Obaid Jeddah

When the global coronavirus pandemic hit, people in some countries ignored it, while others sang from their balconies at the time of lockdown.

In Saudi Arabia, residents trooped to toy stores to buy an all-but-forgotten traditional board game, carrom, which quickly sold out across the Kingdom.

Carrom is a wooden table-top board game that bears many similarities to pool. Different standards and rules exist in different parts of the world.

The board, square in shape, is often placed on four wooden legs, with each player occupying one side of the square.

Demand for carrom boards rocketed as lockdowns and curfews aimed at halting the spread of the coronavirus forced Saudis to look for ways to keep boredom at bay.

For many families, there is no better way to stay entertained than by playing carrom, a board game that both old and young enjoy.

Carrom is popular in many parts of the Gulf region, especially in the coastal areas of Saudi Arabia, where its appeal cuts across all age groups.

Majid Al-Dosari, an engineer working from home in Jeddah, considers himself lucky to have bought a carrom board just days before the item sold out.

"I got into it a few weeks ago after playing games with my future in-laws, and I wanted to get one for my family," he told Arab News.

"We usually meet up for lunch, but now we play carrom together throughout the day. It's coffee and tea and carrom with my brother, his

wife and my sister."

When Jeddah was placed under curfew, Al-Dosari placed his order through the Haraj website. The seller delivered the item to his house two days later for SR90 (\$24).

"Prices of carrom boards tripled afterwards, going for as much as SR300-400. They sold out very quickly," Al-Dosari said.

In many stores in Jeddah, including shops in the city's downtown area, the board game is now out of stock. Customers now are searching the websites of online retailers that claim to import the best carrom boards from India for delivery in Saudi Arabia.

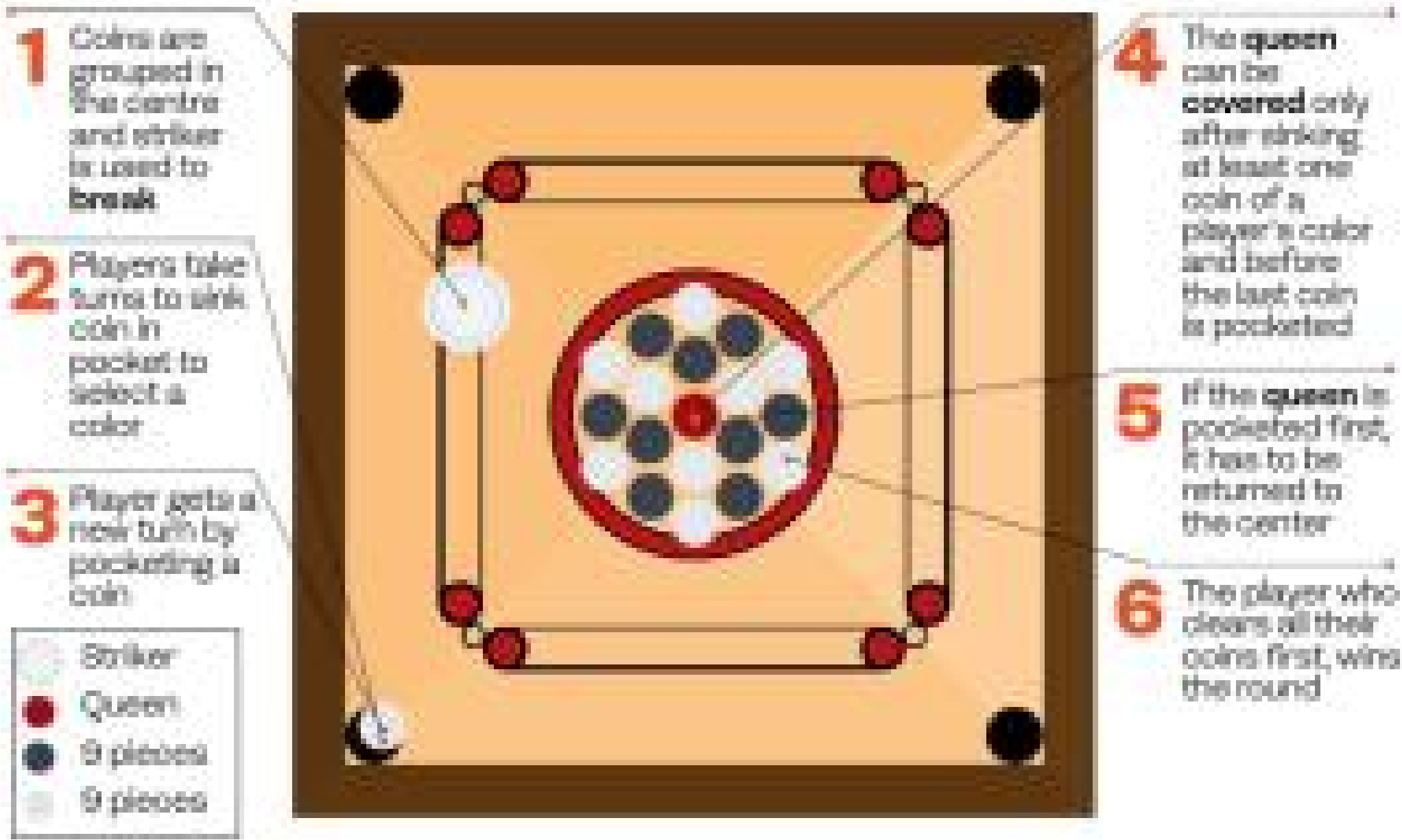
Carrom is most commonly played

THE RULES OF THE GAME

● A carrom game is a competition between two individual players or two teams of two players each. Rival teams are assigned white or black coins before the game starts, and each team tries to win by sinking all nine coins of their color in the pockets and securing the red-colored queen. The queen can only be pursued after at least one carrom man of the player's color has been secured. It cannot be secured if its pocketing is not followed up by the sinking of a carrom man of the player's color.

If either condition is not met, the queen has to be placed back in the middle of the board. Each black and white piece counts as one point, while the queen counts as 5 (3 universally) points. The scoring system varies from region to region, but in most parts of Saudi Arabia, the team that collects 21 points (25 universally) wins the game.

HOW CARROM IS PLAYED



during Ramadan nights as people stay up with family members or friends, waiting for the early morning call to prayer.

At the beginning of a game, small circular wooden disks, called carrom men or coins, are massed in a circle at the center of the board.

The arrangement is considered complete when nine black coins and nine white pieces are positioned in Y formation, surrounded by black coins and the red "queen" in the center. A puck, known as "striker," is then used to flick carrom men and the queen into pockets located at the board's four edges.

Carrom has a variety of names, including carrom, carum, karum, kairam and finger billiards.

While some trace carrom's origins to Portugal, it is in India that the local version of the pastime is hugely popular, with young people gathering in cafes to socialize and unwind by playing a game.

Carrom lore suggests that the game first reached Saudi Arabia via the Hijaz region through traders from India. Over the decades, it became an important part of social life in the Kingdom, featuring in

family events, all-female or all-male meetings, and even in gatherings of children. Saudi artist Najat Mutahr has highlighted Hijaz's links with carrom through an artwork showing grandparents playing the board game with their grandson.

Saad Al-Suwaiyan, a Saudi anthropologist, has described carrom as one of the games played by Saudis for generations and whose appeal has no age limits.

Tribute has been paid in the 12th volume of Al-Suwaiyan's series "Traditional Culture of Saudi Arabia," which is dedicated to popular games and their significance in Arab and Saudi social life.

References to carrom are also to be found in Saudi literature. In her book "Carrom," published in 2019 by Dar Molhimon, author Rehab Abu Zeid says the rules of the game help tackle issues such as patriarchy and paternalism, with the first stroke of a game unleashing chaos in the lives of the novel's characters.

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Even within the Kingdom, there are variations of the game. The most common, Money or Fulcoos, pits two individuals against each

THE ORIGINS OF CARROM

● Carrom is known in different regions of the world in different ways: kayrum (Arabic), caroom, karom, couronne, carum, karam and finger billiards. The modern version is believed to have originated in India. One carrom board with its surface made of glass is available in one of the palaces in the former princely state of Patiala. It became very popular among ordinary Indians after World War I, when different provinces began to hold competitions. The world's longest carrom marathon lasted 34 hrs, 45 mins, 56 secs in India. The fifth round of Carrom World Cup was held in South Korea in 2018.

FINDTHEAPP

Digital 3D versions of carrom are available on Google Play and Apple App Store.

other. Players can collect points, starting from five for a black piece, 10 for a white and 50 points for the queen. The player who collects the most points wins. The arrangements of the coins can vary, but the queen remains central.

Knowledge of the rules of the game are once again in demand in Saudi households.

"I grew up playing carrom with my mom and her family," Nahid Noor, a 39-year-old teacher from Jeddah, told Arab News. "The competition tended to be fierce. A tournament would often take place in the course of a gathering."

Noor, a mother of two, said that over the years, her family lost the habit of carrom playing. The game was played only rarely — until the coronavirus lockdowns began.

She describes her family's carrom board as battered and old, but invaluable. "I just can't seem to find another one of such high quality. I think my mother bought it from a toy shop in Jeddah seven years ago," she said. According to Noor, the board game has made family gatherings more enjoyable during a tense and difficult time.

Late nights are marked by family banter, laughter and, at times, shrieks of disappointment from players when they miss a toss.

"We are all stuck at home now, with nothing to pass the time after everyone is done with their work and chores," she told Arab News.

"So, we are pulling out the old carrom board and starting to play the game again."

VIRUS OUTBREAK

Ministry launches app to monitor COVID-19 patients

Royal decree suspends arrest warrants in 69,900 debt-related judicial cases

Ruba Obaid Jeddah

The Saudi Ministry of Health has launched a new app aimed at monitoring the conditions of people suspected of having the coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

The Tatamman (meaning, rest assured) app will allow individuals who are self-isolating or in quarantine to access up-to-date advice and information on the virus and their health status.

Ministry spokesman, Dr. Mohammed Al-Abd Al-Aly, said: "It (the app) is for those who have the symptoms, or recently returned to Saudi Arabia, those who have been in direct contact with a positive case, as well as those currently under home quarantine as instructed by the ministry."

Users will be able to daily assess their health condition, receive advice, contact medical staff direct-

ly, and evaluate ministry services during their quarantine period. Available in Arabic and English, the app will be supervised by the National Health Emergency Operations Center in cooperation with the Ministry of Health.

Separately, a royal decree has been issued suspending arrest warrants in 69,900 debt-related judicial cases in the Kingdom in an attempt to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in prisons.

The latest measures came as Saudi Arabia announced a total of 2,932 cases. The total number of active cases is 2,260. So far 631 patients have recovered while 41 have died.

The Saudi General Directorate of Public Security has warned that the use of home service providers such as hairdressers and private tutors would be treated as a violation of restrictions to combat the spread of COVID-19, and it urged members of the public to report any such incidents on the

FASTFACTS

2,932

is the total number of coronavirus cases.

631

is the total number of recoveries.

41

is the total number deaths in the Kingdom.

Kollona Amn app or by calling 999 for all regions of the Kingdom, except for Makkah region on 911.

In addition to the royal decree on debt-related cases, all rulings and judgments on around 5,000 cases concerning child visits to separated parents were also suspended.

"Relevant authorities have been notified to enforce the new decree and arrest warrants were immediately lifted electronically," said Mohammad Al-Mutlaq, spokesperson for the Saudi Ministry of Justice. "Orders will remain in force until the end of the exceptional circumstances of the pandemic."

He added that the ministry has digitized around 120 of its services since the beginning of the health crisis which are available through its Najiz platform. More than 300,000 people had used the ministry's virtual services in recent weeks, it was revealed.

Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Creativity

Talent programs continue despite virus outbreak

Educational and talent-application programs for students are continuing despite the coronavirus outbreak in Saudi Arabia. More than 17,000 students are eligible to partake in local and international talent programs, according to the King Abdul Aziz and His Companions' Foundation for Giftedness and Creativity (Mawhiba).

The foundation said it is looking forward to the active participation of community organizations to support talent-sponsorship programs to nurture the leaders of the future.

Students can participate in the annual competitions organized by Mawhiba, which announced the results of its Multiple Cognitive Aptitude Test (https://mawhiba.sa/national_results).

Mawhiba said more than 52,000 students from different regions of the Kingdom took the test, which consists of four main fields: Scientific and mechanical comprehension, spatial-math inference, verbal ability and reading comprehension, and mental flexibility. **SPA Riyadh**

Relief

Deals signed to combat COVID-19 in Yemen, Palestine

The King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center (KSRelief) signed six contracts with specialized companies to provide Yemen and Palestine with essential medical supplies to combat the spread of coronavirus and mitigate its impact on their peoples.

The contracts were signed by KSRelief's General Supervisor Dr. Abdullah Al-Rabeeah during the 10th virtual meeting of the center's committee concerned with combating coronavirus in affected countries.

The meeting, presided over by Al-Rabeeah, discussed means to provide necessary medical assistance to several coronavirus-affected countries.

"The six signed contracts come in the framework of the implementation of the royal orders. They include the provision of a number of essential preventive medical devices and supplies that are used in such crises to support the sisterly Yemen and Palestine in the face of the coronavirus," Al-Rabeeah said. **SPA Riyadh**

Artists use self-isolation to raise awareness



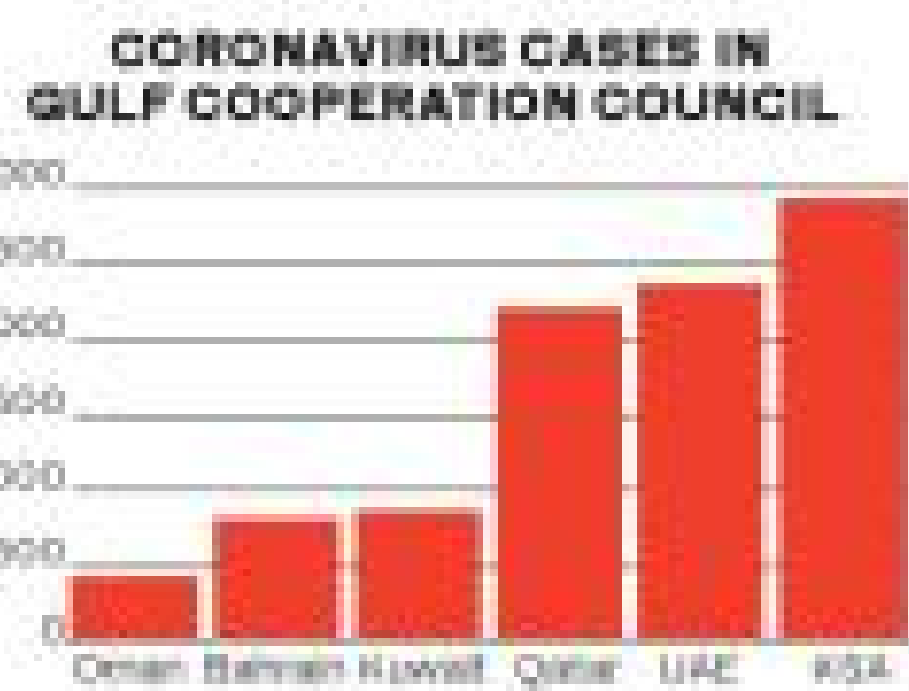
Artists in Jazan have been using their time and energy in self-isolation during the coronavirus outbreak to raise awareness about the pandemic. They used social media to stress the importance of staying at home and abiding by the government's preventive measures about self-isolation and hand hygiene, as well as praising the efforts of health care workers and security forces to keep the population safe, through artwork.

SPA



The Day's FIGURES

Source: Worldometers



DiplomaticQuarter

EMBASSY ACTIVITIES

Riyadh

Swedish envoy praises Kingdom for help with repatriation flights

Swedish Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Niclas Trounev on Wednesday praised Saudi authorities for their help in repatriating Swedish nationals in the wake of the global coronavirus pandemic.

Speaking to Arab News, Trounev said that about 50 Swedes had left the Kingdom on special flights provided by the embassy.

"The embassy has been working intensively in the past couple of weeks to inform and assist all Swedes in the Kingdom about the coronavirus restrictions and the possibilities of returning home," he said.

"We have stressed that everyone should think carefully before deciding to travel at all," the envoy said.

Priority has been given to tourists who have been stranded and are unable to travel back without assistance, and those belonging to certain risk groups, Trounev said.

Swedes who remained in the Kingdom after travel bans were announced had been offered a chance to leave on special commercial flights, Trounev said.

Travelers booked and paid for tickets, although the embassy helped with flight arrangements, he added.

The envoy voiced his gratitude to Saudi Arabian Airlines and the Saudi authorities for making the flights possible.

Trounev said: "Some weeks have already passed and

we are all getting used to the new normal, to a more limited space, with fewer social contacts, and with new ways of working from home by WhatsApp and Skype meetings.

"All of us have to make the best out of where we are. However, we all share one important task: Not to contribute to the further spreading of this deadly virus. We should all avoid unnecessary traveling and moving around, and we need to respect the restrictions put in place to protect us all," he said.

"The curfew is tough, but it will help us to keep safe — and it will not last forever. So let's respect it," he added.

"No one can fight this alone, but together we will prevail and survive."

Trounev also voiced concern about the spread of fake news and propaganda in the wake of the coronavirus crisis.

"This is certainly not the time for political or religious divisions; this is the time for global cooperation, dialogue and solidarity," he said.

"Hopefully, this crisis will teach us that we need more global cooperation, coordination and solidarity, not less. If so, we should use this lesson carefully to deal with other global challenges like conflicts, climate change and poverty. Let's turn the crisis into an opportunity."



COVID-19

196 Saudi expats returned home from Bahrain

Noor Nugali Riyadh

A group of 196 Saudi expats stranded in Bahrain due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) restrictions on movement have been transported home via the King Fahd Causeway connecting the two countries.

The returnees formed the first of four parties of Saudi nationals due to be brought back to the Kingdom after becoming trapped abroad by the global virus outbreak.

In a tweet, Saudi Ambassador to

Bahrain Prince Sultan bin Ahmed bin Abdul Aziz, said: "In compliance with the directives of King Salman and the crown prince (Mohammed bin Salman) to facilitate the procedures for the return of stranded citizens, the embassy, in cooperation with the concerned authorities of the two brotherly kingdoms, begins today — for a period of four days — sending buses scheduled to transport citizens to the Eastern Province via King Fahd Causeway."

The Saudi nationals received medical checks before entering the Kingdom and were placed in specified hotels for quarantine upon arrival. Similar COVID-19 tests and procedures will apply for other groups of Saudi citizens being repatriated, including those returning on flights.

In a video posted on the embassy's official Twitter account on March 27, the Saudi envoy to the UK, Prince Khalid bin Bandar bin Sultan, said: "We all need to stand together as a barrier to halt the virus from spreading. For that, the return of 20,000 or 30,000 citizens

HIGHLIGHTS

• The Saudi nationals received medical checks before entering the Kingdom and were placed in specified hotels for quarantine upon arrival.

• Similar COVID-19 tests and procedures will apply for other groups of Saudi citizens being repatriated, including those returning on flights.

all at once is not logical and not safe for you and your country."

The Saudi Ministry of Education was also coordinating with its 31 cultural bureaus on the health and safety of 124,228 Saudis currently abroad as part of government scholarship programs — 79,113 of them students with 45,115 accompanying family members.

Saudi Minister of Transport Saleh bin Nasser Al-Jasser, who is also chairman of the General Authority of Civil Aviation (GACA), said airport terminals were being readied for

the arrival of expat flights. "GACA has harnessed all its efforts and capabilities to receive the citizens wishing to return to the Kingdom. It has prepared terminals in the Kingdom's international airports — King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh, King Abdul Aziz International Airport in Jeddah and King Fahd International Airport in Dammam," he added.

An announcement is expected soon on which country the next group of Saudi nationals will be returned from.

Saudis given priority to return on the first flights back include those coming from countries worst affected by the virus, elderly citizens, those with expired passports or where flights have been canceled, pregnant women, people with special needs, and humanitarian cases.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs told Arab News that it was not yet clear how many Saudis had registered to come home but those wishing to could apply at <http://www.mofa.gov.sa/es>.



Jessica Ramalho (right) feels safe in the Kingdom and stays busy working out with her trainer. She says it is the result of clear government instructions that the situation has been contained. Photo/Supplied

HOME AWAY FROM HOME

Foreign expats choose Kingdom over home countries during virus pandemic

Government measures to check the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) win praise

Noor Nugali Riyadh

Foreign expats living in Saudi Arabia have been resisting the temptation to head home in the wake of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, opting instead to stay put in the Kingdom.

Since the start of the deadly virus outbreak, Saudi authorities have acted quickly to introduce measures aimed at preventing the spread of COVID-19 and ensuring the safety of citizens.

And the government's moves have reassured many residents from abroad to remain in the Kingdom rather than return to their home countries.

Alexis DeBerry, an events and delegations specialist at King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, told Arab News: "I have been very impressed by the swift actions to safeguard all of the people living in the Kingdom.

"Given the circumstances, I am comforted by the measures taken and the efforts to communicate the adjustments to all."

On March 30, King Salman ordered that coronavirus treatment be made available for all, including people who had overstayed their visas, one of many announcements made by the Saudi government to care for the population of the country.

"It is moving to see the level of generosity displayed by the Kingdom in ensuring that anyone who gets sick from COVID-19 will not have to worry financially about treatment. I am confident in the way things are being handled here and proud to support the requests to stay at home to help save lives," added DeBerry.

She praised the Saudi Health Ministry for its clear communication of COVID-19-related messages via text, social media and other marketing platforms. "I feel safe, calm, and confident that everything I need is right here."

I have been very impressed by the swift actions to safeguard all of the people living in the Kingdom.

Alexis DeBerry
Events and delegations specialist
King Abdullah University of Science and Technology



Food supply is good, emergency services are sound, medical system is functioning.

John Abizaid
US ambassador

Alexis DeBerry keeps herself busy in different fun-filled creative activities. Photo/Supplied

Despite her family being back in the US, DeBerry opted to stay in the Kingdom, fearing that she could have potentially put her family at risk if she had contracted COVID-19 while traveling to America. "It's best for me to stay here and stay safe. Everything I need is here," she said.

In a recent video posted on the US Mission of Saudi Arabia's social media platforms, American Ambassador to the Kingdom John Abizaid urged the US community in Saudi Arabia to "shelter in place" instead of returning home during the global health crisis.

"Food supply is good, emergency services are sound, medical system is functioning," said the envoy.

Jessica Ramalho, a senior consultant at LPC-Omnia International Paris, an advisory and networking agency based in Riyadh, said she

Unlike some other countries, the Kingdom was quick to take swift action and measures at an early stage.

Jessica Ramalho
Senior consultant at LPC-Omnia International Paris

had found a way to accommodate her work-life balance during the 24-hour curfew.

"I have a fantastic working environment here where the leadership quickly modified our schedules to allow us to continue our work-life balance with the new regulations in mind.

"I can take a walk around my

garden in the morning to clear my mind or reschedule an afternoon meeting as needed if I have to go to the grocery shop or pharmacy before curfew," she told Arab News.

"Zoom meetings and monday.com are a few of the great ways my team keeps in contact. We even go so far as to have virtual coffee and fava (fava beans) once a week and check in with each other, offering support and sometimes funny updates of what is happening at home."

Ramalho pointed out that being at home had given her the time and opportunity to try out new food recipes from her Saudi friends and perfect her duggas and tabbouleh dishes. "Virtual cooking sessions on my tablet is extra fun. I am sure some of this would have been possible if I had gone back to the US, but it would not have been the

same," she added.

Although given the chance to take a flight to the UK for returning British nationals, she decided to stay in Saudi Arabia.

"Unlike some other countries, the Kingdom was quick to take swift action and measures at an early stage, some of which included suspending international flights, prohibiting foreigners from visiting Makkah, closing public places, enforcing curfews, and so on," she said.

"It is the result of clear instructions from the government and the consolidation of all these actions that has led to the situation here being contained, giving citizens optimism that life can return to normalcy sooner than in other parts of the world."

Alexander Sell, the German general manager of the Ritz-Carlton hotel in Jeddah, told Arab News: "I am impressed with the precautionary steps that the Kingdom has taken from the beginning, earlier than most countries.

"The decrees came strong but precise. They felt too much at first but made perfect sense right after. Society has accepted the circumstances and supports it in unity. No discussions about special rules or exceptions, this seems to be the best, fastest and most secure way to overcome the crisis.

"I feel deeply connected with the company, property and country and for me it's a duty to stay, being with my team and offering support with my presence in such challenging times."

Sell said he had been passing time doing sports activities, although under the new curfew he has had to switch indoors which has limited space.

"Self-discipline is the most important asset to either nurture or learn now. Establishing a routine, and sticking to it daily, is the best advice I can give. Use your time to trim your body, eat well and healthily, educate yourself with reading and stay positive. The crisis will be over soon and we all will value different, more important things than before COVID-19."

TheSpace

COVID-19: Pandemic fears open digital gateway to financial fraudsters

TALAT ZAKI HAFIZ



The Saudi Arabian Monetary Authority (SAMA) defines financial fraud as, "any act involving deceit to obtain a direct or indirect financial benefit by the perpetrator or by others with his help, causing a loss to the deceived party."

Financial fraud has become a major global issue, especially with the proliferation of modern communication tools, such as the internet and electronic sites, smartphones and other devices.

SAMA has indicated that fraudsters are becoming more skilled in using the latest technologies to strengthen their capabilities and they have been helped by the cheap prices of PCs, scanners, laser printers, and

Among the most common methods of financial and banking fraud, especially at the level of individuals, are contacting potential victims to say they have won a cash prize and promising them big profits from currency trading.

copying machines.

Among the most common methods of financial and banking fraud, especially at the level of individuals, are contacting potential victims to say they have won a cash prize and promising them big profits from currency trading.

Unfortunately, fraudsters have taken advantage of public panic over the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, pretending to represent the World Health Organization (WHO) to steal money or sensitive information from individuals.

WHO has advised anyone contacted by a person or body purporting to be from the organization, to verify authenticity before responding. Furthermore, WHO has stressed that it never asks for usernames or passwords to access safety information or conduct lotteries, offer prizes, grants, certificates or funding through emails.

INTERPOL has also warned the public about the potential dangers of buying medical supplies online, advising people to double-check website addresses and ensure that payment is secured.

Talat Zaki Hafiz is an economist and financial analyst.

News Middle East

HEALTH EMERGENCY

Lebanon may tighten health checks after returning expats test positive

Officials considering suspension of flights from Europe, strict measures within country

Najla Houssari Beirut

Lebanon may tighten health checks on expats after 11 out of the 226 nationals who returned on Tuesday tested positive for coronavirus.

The expats had come back from Paris and Madrid, and there was an additional coronavirus case discovered on a private jet.

Those returning from abroad were placed in quarantine for 14 days, as were the employees who came into contact with them at hotels they spent their first night in upon arriving in Beirut.

Lebanon had 575 cases as of Wednesday and a death toll of 19, according to a Health Ministry report.

"We have not recorded cases among passengers returning from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Kinshasa because these countries are not considered infected with the virus," Dr. Abdul Rahman Bizri, an infectious disease specialist and member of the emergency coronavirus committee on coronavirus, told Arab News.

"The problem was with citizens returning from Europe, as many of those countries have a high number of cases. In light of the test results of expatriates returning from Istanbul and Lagos, we will assess the matter and make decisions at a medical meeting on Thursday, and we may be strict in testing people before they board the plane to Beirut."

Officials are also considering suspension of operations to repatriate Lebanese from Europe.

Lebanese President Michel Aoun said there was a need for tighter security measures and to maintain coordination between the military and security forces, while Prime Minister Hassan Diab said it was important to take precautions and "preemptive security (measures) to ensure stability."

The Supreme Council of Defense is due to discuss the possibility of extending the general mobilization period until the end of this month.

Bizri said that the spread of



A Lebanese girl, who was stranded abroad by coronavirus lockdowns is quarantined at a hotel while awaiting results for COVID-19 in Beirut on Wednesday. Reuters

the virus in Bsharri town, where there have been 34 more cases, required Lebanese municipal authorities to enforce quarantines because returning expats hailed from different regions. Monitoring quarantine was the responsibility of the Interior Ministry, he added.

Health Minister Hamad Hassan said that the critical period between containing the epidemic in Lebanon and the continuation of its spread would extend until the end of this month.

He visited Bsharri to inspect the situation and the preventive measures put in place to check the spread of the disease.

Amaury Gregoire, who is head of

FASTFACTS

• Lebanon has reported 575 COVID-19 cases.

• The virus-related death toll is 19.

the Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) mission in Lebanon, expressed concern about the insufficient number of team members currently present in the Bekaa Valley in the event of an outbreak. This region includes Syrian and Palestinian refugee camps, although no cases have been reported in camps.

He said medical centers were

making preparations "to better anticipate the flood of COVID-19 patients" and that nonemergency surgical services would be temporarily suspended.

Hospitals in Bekaa and south Lebanon, especially the central hospital of the Palestine Red Crescent Society in Lebanon, were being supported through the provision of hygiene supplies and breathing tubes for patients, in addition to training UN staff in infection prevention and control, and organizing intensive health awareness sessions in COVID-19 for fragile communities in Tripoli and Akkar.

Lebanese Minister of Social Affairs Ramzi Musharrafieh launched

a program within the social emergency plan to help families affected by the pandemic.

He emphasized in a press conference that none of the families that submitted their forms to the ministry will be excluded, and the Lebanese army will distribute aid.

Sheikh Abdul Latif Derian, the grand mufti of Lebanon, directed institutions affiliated with Dar Al-Fatwa in all governorates to work with philanthropists to help the needy and alleviate hunger and poverty.

Derian appealed to Arab states to support Lebanon and its people in facing the repercussions of the coronavirus pandemic.

OFFENSIVE

Yemeni Army makes gains in Al-Jawf, Al-Bayda provinces

Saeed Al-Batati Al-Mukalla

The Yemeni Army and allied tribesmen seized a military base in the northern province of Al-Jawf, and a large swathe of land in the central province of Al-Bayda, following intense battles with Iran-backed Houthis, army commanders and government officials said on Wednesday.

Yemeni Information Minister Muammar Al-Bryani said government troops recaptured the Lahenat military base in Al-Jawf and surrounding areas from the Houthis.

He added that Arab coalition warplanes and their military experts on the ground have played a key role in helping government troops take the upper hand on the battlefield.

Local military commanders say their next goal is consolidating their positions around the military base before launching another offensive on Al-Jawf's capital Hazem, which fell to the Houthis last month.

Col. Rabia Al-Qurashi, the army's spokesman in Al-Jawf, told Arab News on Wednesday that troops were stationed almost 10 km from Hazem as the Arab coalition targeted Houthi gatherings in the city to pave the way for the troops to storm it.

Al-Qurashi thanked the Arab coalition for its continued support and said the Houthis suffered heavy blows in Al-Jawf after failing to convince army officers and tribal leaders to switch sides. In Al-Bayda, government forces seized a sprawling chain of mountains in Mahjem and Nates after killing dozens of Houthi fighters on Tuesday.

State TV quoted Maj. Gen. Moufreh Al-Boubeh as saying government forces liberated Al-Ghader, Waled and Qida mountains after a swift assault against the Houthis, at least 40 of whom were killed in the fighting.

The Arab coalition carried out at least five air sorties, targeting Houthi military gatherings and reinforcements.

Backed by air support and military logistics from the coalition, Yemeni Army troops and allied tribesmen last week seized most of Helan, a chain of mountains from where the Houthis would shell residential areas in the densely populated city of Marib.

INJUSTICE

OIC's rights body slams Israeli treatment of Palestinian inmates

Arab News Jeddah

The rights body of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) on Wednesday expressed concern over reports of ill treatment meted out to more than 5,000 Palestinian prisoners, including women and children, languishing in Israeli jails.

The OIC's Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission (IPHRC) said amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, the lack of mandatory basic hygiene and health facilities in Israeli jails is a matter of concern.

It called on Israeli authorities to provide incarcerated Palestinians with basic facilities, in accordance with Article 76 of the Geneva Convention and relevant provisions of international human rights and humanitarian laws.

The IPHRC said Israel, the "occupying power," routinely flouts its international obligations under the illegal and immoral pretext of "administrative detentions" by indefinitely detaining Palestinian children and innocent civilians, without charge and without access



Israeli forces detain a Palestinian following a protest in support of inmates. Reuters/File

to justice.

"In view of the global health emergency, precarious hygienic conditions, inadequate health services and overcrowded Israeli prisons constitute perfect

conditions for the catastrophic spread of the pandemic, putting the lives of inmates at grave risk and creating an environment for major unrest in the prisons," the IPHRC said.

BACKGROUND

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has urged all governments to "examine ways to release those particularly vulnerable to this pandemic," including "those detained without sufficient legal basis, political prisoners and others detained simply for expressing critical or dissenting views."

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has urged all governments to "examine ways to release those particularly vulnerable to this pandemic," including "those detained without sufficient legal basis, political prisoners and others detained simply for expressing critical or dissenting views."

The IPHRC urged the international community, especially the UN, to pressure Israel to release all those arbitrarily detained without any legal basis, and those particularly vulnerable to COVID-19, as well as to safeguard the human rights of all Palestinian inmates.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

Jordan announces 48-hour sweeping nationwide curfew

Reuters, AFP Amman, Cairo

Jordan announced a 48-hour sweeping nationwide curfew that would start from Thursday midnight, in a stepped-up bid to stem the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), a government spokesman said.

Two weeks ago, the government relaxed a tight curfew that allowed people to go on foot during the day to buy groceries to ease daily life for the nearly 10 million inhabitants.

Last Thursday, the kingdom imposed a 24-hour curfew to allow medical staff unimpeded entry to areas they suspect the virus is spreading in, a move which brought public life to a complete standstill.

Egypt will also extend a nationwide nighttime curfew by a further two weeks in a bid to slow the spread of the coronavirus, Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouli said on Wednesday.

He told a news conference the measure would be enforced from 8 p.m. to 6 a.m. and run until April 23.

The curfew would start an hour later, he said, to avoid overcrowding on public transport.

Schools and universities, as well as

HIGHLIGHTS

• Curfew in Jordan will begin from Thursday midnight.

• Egypt will also extend a nationwide nighttime curfew by a further two weeks.

restaurants and cafes would also remain closed until then, while food outlets would be allowed to offer delivery services only.

To stem the spread of the coronavirus, authorities have also halted air traffic until the end of the month and closed tourist and religious sites.

Penalties against violators including fines of up to 4,000 Egyptian pounds (just over \$250) and even prison, the prime minister said.

Madbouli also announced that Cabinet members will take a 20 percent salary cut for three months, and allocate that sum to underprivileged Egyptians.

Egypt's Health Ministry has so far declared 94 fatalities out of 1,450 confirmed cases of COVID-19.

News International

TIMELY MOVE

Tech experts laud WhatsApp forwarding limits

Decision taken to tackle fake news crisis amid coronavirus pandemic

Charlie Peters London

Tech experts have welcomed WhatsApp's decision to launch a new feature to restrict the freedom to forward messages, in a bid to crack down on a new fake news crisis surrounding the coronavirus pandemic.

WhatsApp will reduce the number of contacts or groups a person can forward a regularly shared message from five to one.

If a regularly forwarded message is received, the content will now include a double arrow symbol to alert the user to the message's popularity.

Caroline Das-Monfrais, chief strategy officer at FTI Consulting, told Arab News that the cap on forwarding is "intervention that's welcomed."

She added: "WhatsApp has proactively empowered its customers to make their own choices. Everyone has a responsibility in the fight against fake news. Tech companies provide the tools, but we should all exercise judgement."

The "double arrow" symbol showing that something has been frequently forwarded is great innovation," Das-Monfrais said.

"Tech companies can't and shouldn't go all the way and monitor peoples' messages. There's an element of trust and freedom

in WhatsApp's solution. They're doing the right thing in this limited approach."

In recent weeks, new conspiracy theories surrounding COVID-19 have led to calls for social media companies and regulators to act to prevent the spread of fake news.

Untruths about 5G technology have inspired criminal acts throughout the UK, with telecoms masts being targeted by arsonists.

Prominent British boxer Amir Khan shared a false story that COVID-19 is a man-made pandemic that was released to "control the population to install 5G towers."

TV personality and "Britain's Got Talent" judge Amanda Holden later faced criticism for sharing the same story.

Jo Stevens, Labour MP for Cardiff Central, said the move by WhatsApp is "an encouraging step to help prevent dangerous disinformation spreading about COVID-19."

She added: "We've seen the impact it (disinformation) has had this week with criminal damage to 5G masts on the basis of false claims."

Ed Valzey, former British minister for culture, communications and creative industries, told Arab News that the spread of fake news around COVID-19 is "potentially a matter of life and death. If people are misled



HIGHLIGHTS

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British boxer Amir Khan shared a false story that COVID-19 is a man-made pandemic that was released to 'control the population to install 5G towers.'

Untruths about 5G technology have inspired criminal acts throughout the UK, with telecoms masts being targeted by arsonists.

about precautions and cures, that could cause very serious harm."

He said: "It has forced tech companies to act and put resources into combating fake news in a way they didn't before when it came to elections or general malicious issues like anti-vaccination campaigns, which caused harm but in a less high-profile way."

Valzey added: "If we're going to learn any lesson from this pandemic, it's that fake news is very damaging and that tech companies have the capacity to have an effect on it."

"There's an ecosystem of innovative new companies like NewsGuard bringing up the fight against fake news. After the pandemic ends, governments must redouble their efforts to take the issue seriously."

On Tuesday, a WhatsApp spokesperson said in a statement: "We've seen a significant increase in the amount of forwarding which users have told us can feel overwhelming and can contribute to the spread of misinformation."

"We believe it's important to slow the spread of these messages to keep WhatsApp a place for personal conversation."

Unlike Facebook and Twitter, WhatsApp's messaging encryption software prevents its own workers and third parties from viewing content sent on the platform.

This prevents it from using

intrusive content-removing software employed by other social media or messaging companies.

Instead, WhatsApp has opted to toughen so-called messaging friction, the software and freedom users have to share information.

In 2018, it was possible to forward a message to 250 contacts and groups at once. Last year, the limit was set at five, before now being reduced to one.

It will still be possible for a user to widely share content, but WhatsApp is confident that the change will slow down the spread of misinformation.

While fake news is in the company's crosshairs, it knows that popular comic forwarded messages are a great way to share joy during difficult times.

"We know many users forward helpful information, as well as funny videos, memes and reflections or prayers they find meaningful. In recent weeks, people have also used WhatsApp to organize public moments of support for frontline health workers," the company's spokesperson said.

Many WhatsApp users have reported a surge in their usage of the app in order to keep in touch with distant friends and family, with one Twitter user joking that the change to the platform's forwarding limits will "cut messages from my parents by 89 percent."

LONG BATTLE

Vaccine development speeds up to counter COVID-19 threat

Decade-long period could be reduced to 12-18 months to end novel coronavirus pandemic

Arab News London

The coronavirus pandemic has crashed stock markets, ground economies to a halt, and led to unprecedented numbers of people and businesses seeking government assistance, especially in the West.

But in one area, perhaps understandably, it has led to something of an explosion in terms of progress.

That area is vaccine development, where the discovery, testing and mass production of a solution to the pandemic have become both an essential solution to the crisis and something of a medical gold rush.

Under normal circumstances, vaccines can take 10 years to

Moderna, in collaboration with the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease in the US, developed the first COVID-19 vaccine in clinical trials using a genetic platform called messenger RNA (mRNA). It took only 42 days to move from vaccine design to human testing — an industry record.

produce. It is a difficult, lengthy process, costing hundreds of millions of dollars, which is usually dependent on demand for the vaccine in question.

There are all manner of factors to be taken into account — everything from relative effectiveness to side effects and production costs.

An ailment that affects more people, or that has a greater chance of having a vaccine found, is more likely to receive the funding it needs because it is more profitable.

Meanwhile, a vaccine that protects against a certain ailment but carries the risk of significant negative side effects is not exactly a cure. But COVID-19 is a different beast — the sheer scale of the economic damage it has wrought makes finding a vaccine of the utmost importance.



A medic from Jilin Province tears up during a ceremony to reopen Wuhan's Tianhe Airport in China's central Hubei province on Wednesday. Thousands of Chinese rushed to leave COVID-19-ravaged Wuhan as authorities lifted a more than two-month prohibition on outbound travel from the city where the global pandemic first emerged. AFP

Elissa Pritchep, the precision medicine lead at the World Economic Forum, said given the pressing need, a vaccine for COVID-19 could be developed in 12-18 months — a vast tract of time for those living under lockdown, but lightning quick in the medical world.

The international community has, according to her, been working together "like never before" on producing a COVID-19 vaccine.

"Around Jan. 10, Chinese scientists developed and shared a full genetic sequence of SARS-CoV2, the virus that causes COVID-19," said Pritchep.

"Several companies are using this information to develop vaccines that will contain a small amount of genetic code. Certain cells in the

BACKGROUND

A vaccine that protects against a certain ailment but carries the risk of significant negative side effects is not exactly a cure.

body will take up this genetic information and produce elements of the virus, not infecting the person but triggering the immune system to respond," she added.

"DNA- or RNA-based vaccines are not made with a weakened or deactivated virus, nor elements of the virus, so they can be produced in the lab. This approach is faster and more reliable than traditional vaccine processing, which uses virus grown in eggs or cell cultures."

"For example, Moderna, in

collaboration with the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease in the US, developed the first COVID-19 vaccine in clinical trials using a genetic platform called messenger RNA (mRNA). It took only 42 days to move from vaccine design to human testing — an industry record."

However, we remain some way off developing a safe human vaccine. That said, the precedent set by the international community in tackling COVID-19 could be the blueprint for expediting vaccine development in future.

"A rush to market without appropriate testing could put healthy people at risk. One area of risk is vaccine enhancement, meaning the disease is more harmful to a vaccinated person," said Pritchep.

"The clinical trial process typically involves several phases, including randomized, double blind, placebo-controlled studies, and takes approximately 10 years, but governments and industry are making efforts to expedite the process. If manufacturing begins during trials, then a vaccine will be available to the public upon approval," she added.

"To mitigate this risk and encourage manufacturing, governments, industry and international organizations are working together. The innovative and cooperative approach taken for this vaccine could change how scientists develop future ones. This could make discovery faster, production more reliable, and vaccines potentially more cost effective."

WATCHDOG REPORT

Assad air force 'behind chemical attacks'

Reuters New York

Syrian Arab Air Force pilots flying Sukhoi Su-22 military planes and a helicopter dropped bombs containing poisonous chlorine and sarin nerve gas on a village in the country's western Hama region in March 2017, a new team at the global chemical weapons watchdog has concluded in its first report.

The special investigative unit was established by members of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in 2018 to identify perpetrators of illegal attacks. Until now the OPCW had only been authorised to say whether chemical attacks occurred, not who perpetrated them.

Officials in the regime of Syrian President Bashar Assad and its military backer Russia have repeatedly denied using chemical weapons and accuse insurgents of staging attacks to implicate Syrian forces.

There was no immediate reaction from Damascus to the report. The

FAST FACT

The OPCW Investigation and Identification Team, the formation of which was opposed by Moscow and Damascus, said more than 100 people were affected by the attacks, carried out on March 24, 25 and 30 in 2017 in the town of Ltamenah.

OPCW Investigation and Identification Team (IIT), the formation of which was opposed by Moscow and Damascus, said more than 100 people were affected by the attacks, carried out on March 24, 25 and 30 in 2017 in the town of Ltamenah.

"As the investigation progressed, and various hypotheses were considered, the IIT gradually came to these conclusions as the only ones that could reasonably be reached from the information obtained, taken as a whole," the report said.

The 50th Brigade of the 22nd Air Division of the Syrian Air Force dropped M4000 aerial bombs containing sarin on the town and a cylinder containing chlorine on a hospital. The raids were conducted from the Sharat and Hama air bases, it said.



Volunteers distribute food to people in need during a government-imposed nationwide lockdown as a preventive measure on the outskirts of Amritsar on Wednesday. AFP

REMAINING VIGILANT

India could extend lockdown as coronavirus cases spike

More than 500 new cases were recorded in the past 24 hours while 25 deaths were reported

Sanjay Kumar New Delhi

India could extend its lockdown beyond April 14, the prime minister said Wednesday as the number of coronavirus cases spiked.

"Lifting the lockdown does not seem possible," Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi told an all-party meeting, saying that "massive behavioral, social and personal changes" would have to take place. A final call to extend the deadline would be taken on April 11, the meeting heard.

"The priority of the government is to save each and every life," the prime minister added. "The situation in the country is akin to a social emergency, it has necessitated tough decisions and we must continue to remain vigilant."

There has been a steady increase in coronavirus cases during the past week and the figure hit 5,500 on Wednesday — double the number from four days ago.

More than 500 new cases were recorded in the past 24 hours — the highest jump since the lockdown started on March 24 — while 25 deaths were reported.

Maharashtra state had the biggest rise in cases with 1,100, and a death toll of 55. The southern state of Tamil Nadu has more than 700

cases, and Delhi has more than 600.

"India has entered the third stage of the pandemic, where the number of patients getting infected exceeds the number of patients getting cured," Dr. Avinash Bhondwe, president of the Maharashtra branch of the Indian Medical Association, told Arab News. "The number of newly infected patients rises very quickly and the death toll also increases faster. We are experiencing community spread, that's why many places are sealed off as a protective measure of epidemic control."

He added that the next seven days would be crucial and, if the graph of newly infected patients kept rising exponentially, the lockdown period may be increased by another four weeks.

There is also a rise in the number of medical professionals getting infected by coronavirus, with a lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) causing anxiety among health workers.

Media reports said the capital needed 3,000 PPE a day but only had a stock of 4,000. Local authorities have demanded 50,000 kits from the central government but have only received an assurance of 27,000.

The Delhi State Cancer Institute closed on Tuesday after 18 health-care workers became infected.

"As a precautionary measure, we have shut down various facilities of the hospital for sanitization measures," Dr. B.L. Sherwal, the hospital's medical superintendent, told the media. "We are making arrangements to move our 19 cancer patients to another private hospital."

Mumbai's private Wockhardt Hospital shut on Monday after 26 nurses and three doctors tested positive for the virus.

"We have declared Wockhardt Hospital a containment zone and

some patients were coronavirus positive and this information was kept secret from the health workers," Manthadathil told Arab News.

He added that health workers everywhere were worried because of the lack of PPE, and that a public interest litigation suit had been filed with the Supreme Court to address the issue.

The Resident Doctors' Association of the All India Institute of Medical Science expressed concern about the backlash it was getting for demanding PPE. It said it was the government's responsibility to respect medical professionals rather than humiliate them.

"In the absence of PPE, the doctors feel as if they are participating in a suicide squad," Bhondwe said. "Once a doctor gets infected, his own family as well as all the 30-40 patients, he examines daily are at risk of getting the infection from this doctor. So the doctor may become a cause for the spread of infection."

Another doctor, Loveleen Mangla, felt a "deep sense of anxiety" in the absence of PPE.

"I have moved my parents to some other house as a matter of precaution," she told Arab News. "Besides, now the government is making provisions to quarantine a medical professional for two weeks after a week of duty in the hospital."

FASTFACTS

- Lockdown started March 24.
- Number of cases hit 5,500.

have removed 30 doctors and nurses from there," Vijay Khabale-Patil, chief public relations officer of the Bombay Municipal Corporation, told reporters. "We have shifted these Covid-19 suspected cases to the Seven Hills Hospital in Mumbai, where further tests will be carried out."

Jasminsha Manthadathil, the president of United Nursing Association, accused the hospital of "hiding the truth."

"The hospital was aware that

Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Ray of hope

Wuhan opens, sparking hope amid rising deaths

Thousands streamed out of the Chinese city of Wuhan on Wednesday after a lockdown on the birthplace of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) was lifted, offering a ray of hope even as Europe and the US faced rising deaths and crippling economic pain.

As Wuhan reawakens, Western countries remain in the throes of a crisis that has claimed the lives of more than 80,000 people worldwide and forced around half of humanity into some form of lockdown.

The hardest-hit countries, among them Italy, Spain, France and the US, are grappling with how to balance public safety with the devastating impact of shutdowns. **AFP**

Stemming scourge

Ethiopia in state of emergency to fight coronavirus

Ethiopia on Wednesday declared a state of emergency to fight the coronavirus pandemic, which has so far infected 52 people and resulted in two deaths there.

It is the first state of emergency announced under Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, who came to power in 2018 and won last year's Nobel Peace Prize in part for expanding political freedoms in the authoritarian nation.

"Because the coronavirus pandemic is getting worse, the Ethiopian government has decided to declare a state of emergency under Article 93 of the constitution," Abiy said in a statement. **AFP**

The Day's FIGURES

Source: Statistics



What We Are Reading Today

FROM AROUND THE WEB & IN PRINT

Comparing the Literatures

DAVID DAMROSCH

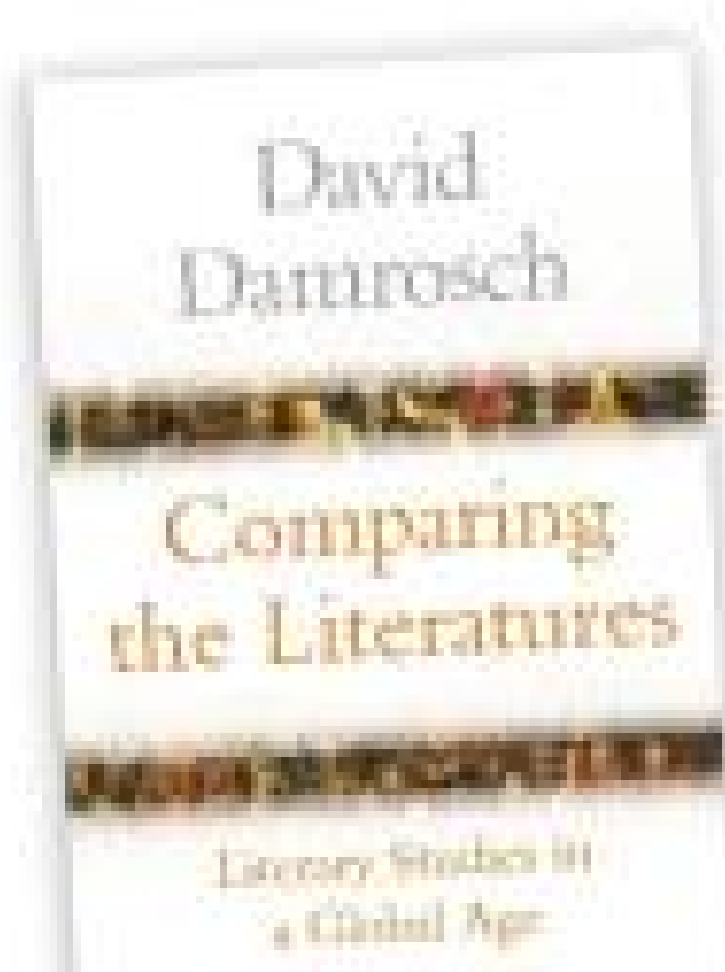
Literary studies are being transformed today by the expansive and disruptive forces of globalization. More works than ever circulate worldwide in English and in translation, and even national traditions are increasingly seen in transnational terms.

To encompass this expanding literary universe, scholars and teachers need to expand their linguistic and cultural resources, rethink their methods and training, and reconceive the place of literature and criticism in the world. In

Comparing the Literatures, David Damrosch integrates comparative, postcolonial, and world-literary perspectives to offer a comprehensive overview of comparative studies and its prospects in a time of great upheaval and great opportunity.

Comparing the Literatures looks both at institutional forces and at key episodes in the life and work of comparatists who

have struggled to define and redefine the terms of literary analysis over the past two centuries, from Johann Gottfried Herder and Germaine de Staël to Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Franco Moretti, and Emily Apter.



Row erupts

EU Science chief resigns over virus response

A blistering row erupted Wednesday after the head of the EU's top science funding agency resigned and attacked the bloc's handling of the coronavirus crisis.

Mauro Ferrari quit as president of the European Research Council (ERC) after just three months, telling the Financial Times he was "extremely disappointed" by the EU's response to the pandemic, which has hit Italy and Spain particularly hard.

The ERC hit back with a lengthy statement accusing Ferrari of being "economical with the truth" and lambasting him for not showing proper commitment to the job.

AFP

Saving the swap

Afghan govt to release 100 Taliban prisoners

The Afghan government will release 100 Taliban prisoners on Wednesday, an official told AFP, a day after the insurgents said they were walking out of talks with Kabul.

The two foes have been negotiating in Kabul since last week to try to finalize a prisoner swap that was originally supposed to have happened by March 10 and pave the way for "intra-Afghan" peace talks between Kabul and the Taliban.

But the swap has been beset with problems, with Kabul claiming the Taliban want 15 "top commanders" to be released, while the insurgents have accused Afghan authorities of needlessly wasting time.

AFP

SHARING IS CARING

Filipino troops donate wages to help fight COVID-19 outbreak

Ellie Aben Manila

Filipino troops have gone beyond the call of duty and agreed to give up a portion of their pay to help the country's efforts to slow the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak.

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) announced the gesture on Wednesday, a day after President Rodrigo Duterte approved an extension to a total lockdown on Luzon — the country's main island housing the capital Manila — until April 30.

"In commiserating with our countrymen who were unfortunate to contract the disease (COVID-19), and as a manifestation of full support to government, each regular member of the AFP — from the highest-ranking general to the lowest-ranking personnel — will donate an amount based from



The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) will donate part of their salaries to help fight the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. **Files/AFP**

HIGHLIGHT

Gesture aimed at 'sharing nation's burden' in tackling pandemic: Armed forces chief.

a certain percentage deduction from their respective base pays for May," said AFP chief, Gen. Felimon Santos Jr.

The amount to be deducted from salaries will be equitable according

to rank. Santos will make the most significant contribution of 10,484 Philippine pesos (\$207), while the lowest-ranking soldier, a private, along with airmen and apprentice seamen will donate 100 pesos.

AFP spokesperson, Marine Brig. Gen. Edgard Arevalo, said that the AFP leadership had "heard the commander-in-chief's candid admission in a televised address to the nation (on Monday night) that the government will not have

YOUR DAILY ARABIC PROVERB

Three human qualities become evident in three situations: Bravery in battle, patience in anger, and friendship in the time of need.

All Ibn Abi Taleb
(The Fourth Caliph)

Opinion

US, Iran should heed call for change in diplomatic mood

ALISTAIR BURT



Alistair Burt is a former UK Member of Parliament who has twice held ministerial positions in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office — as Parliamentary Under Secretary of State from 2010 to 2013 and as Minister of State for the Middle East from 2017 to 2019.
Twitter: @AlistairBurtUK

It has been some two weeks since UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres made his plea for a global cease-fire as the scale of the onslaught of coronavirus became clear. He pointed out that war-torn areas and places to which millions of refugees had fled were particularly vulnerable to the virus, and only a swift end to the fighting could allow the necessary medical and health infrastructure to be provided.

His plea was echoed around the world by diplomats and leaders, who coupled their support with the hope that the enormity of what mankind was facing might also prompt a diplomatic rethink in other areas of confrontation, providing a “ladder to climb down” for the most intractable of disputes, which have led incalculable numbers to long-term misery.

As there are very few arguments in favor of conflict, such pleas should command rhetorical support and perhaps also, unusually, some degree of practical response. So what have we seen? It has not been entirely cynical, though it is difficult to disentangle what has resulted from the plea from other causes.

Leaders in the Philippines, Sudan and Ukraine backed the call. Israel and its neighbors in Ramallah and Gaza are working together — to a degree — aware of a virus

that recognizes no checkpoints or occupied territory. The UN General Assembly backed a sympathetic resolution. But it's not good everywhere. Although Syria has seen a reduction in fighting, sporadic incidents remain and locals believe that a wave of fear of illness running through the Syrian regime forces is more responsible for the diminution of their violence than anything else. In Libya, there is evidence that politicians from east and west have reached out to each other in tackling the virus outbreak, though an attempted cease-fire did not hold and attacks on Tripoli continue. In Yemen, an upsurge of violence further threatens a weary population and a Houthi missile attack on Riyadh seemed an apt answer as to how the insurgents interpreted Guterres' plea, even as Saudi Arabia was reaching out for a resumption of talks.

We need some evidence that the change of thought behind the call from Guterres was being heeded as much as individual events that might be useful symbols. What he was truly looking for was an indication that states were ready to recognize this severe and likely recurring threat to humanity as an opportunity to rethink the fundamentals of diplomacy, rather than simply an event to be taken advantage of before an opponent did so, so as not to lose out when the goodwill dimmed. Because what happens if,

as history would suggest it might, the world does not take this opportunity but rather slips back?

There is a naive belief that no one will be much damaged. If we lose a “kumbaya” moment, the world will revert comfortably to where we were, and those states and individuals whose position is based on having enemies rather than friends — and there are more of them than would admit — can breathe a sigh of relief and get back to ensuring domestic success on the back of targeting some foreigner or other.

But I do not believe in this self-serving and comfortable position. The likelihood is that, if we miss this chance, the path back will have been made seriously harder. If lives are lost because conflict affects the transfer of aid, resulting in a significant number of deaths, are leaders and activists not likely to be more intransigent? Will yet another memory/date be forged on the unending monuments to injustices committed by one against another, only this time shrouded in the awareness of backs being turned when the needy were facing an existential medical catastrophe? How do we return to a status quo after that?

So I am interested in how the US and Iran respond to a call this week from the European Leadership Network for some targeted sanctions relief to assist the Iranian

people in dealing with what is perhaps the highest coronavirus mortality rate in the world. This appeal was not made by Scout movement activists, but was signed by former US secretaries of state and defense, four former NATO secretaries-general, and an ex-EU high representative — in all, 24 exceptional people who know what negotiations with Iran are all about. They recognize that events have changed the nature and impact of the existing sanctions, and their targeted call builds on existing exemptions.

They make the point that the handlers of medical devices and goods would be the private sector, and the doctors who would be the beneficiaries of working with them are the pillars of Iranian civil society, not the Iranian government. Such a gesture is not only the right thing to do, but it would also pose a smart challenge to elements in Iran to respond, as they should, and act to protect lives in Europe, America and around the world, as global security emphasizes the importance of protecting the weakest links.

I commend the plan and urge support and its adoption, as the signatories also recognize that failure to assist has consequences too. Both the Iranian people and the US deserve more than the usual standoff at this time. Let's see if this well-thought-through work delivers the change of diplomatic mood that Guterres has been looking for.

☹☹
If we miss this chance, the path back will have been made seriously harder

COURTESY: AHMAD HUSAIN/ANWAR AL-AWAZ



☹☹
There have been discouraging signs that success with containment could be prone to at least partial reversal

Coronavirus crisis far from over despite rays of hope

ANDREW HAMMOND



Andrew Hammond is an Associate at LSE IDEAS at the London School of Economics.

This week has seen growing optimism in Asia and Europe that the coronavirus crisis may have passed its peak in these areas. Yet, while global markets have been buoyed by these developments, from Wuhan to Western Europe, it is still too early to conclusively say that the tide has turned.

Across Asia, for instance, numerous countries that appeared to have the pandemic under control, including Hong Kong and South Korea, have tightened borders and imposed stricter containment measures in recent days, given growing concern of new infections “imported” from elsewhere. This has given rise to speculation that, rather than seeing one big lockdown in each country — on which the theory rests that countries will rapidly “bounce back” from the crisis — there may be the need for a number of semi-continuous restrictions.

While it remains possible that this rapid bounce-back theory turns out to be true, several previous coronavirus-related consensus have been smashed in recent weeks. Remember that a little over two months ago, for instance, there was a widespread belief that the virus might be a China-only challenge.

This week's optimistic air has come not just from Asia, with China on Wednesday lifting

restrictive measures in Wuhan, but also in Europe, where death rates may have peaked in the continent's as yet worst-affected countries Italy and Spain, and the separate news announced Monday that Austria and the Czech Republic are preparing to relax restrictions after the coming Easter weekend.

The news from Wuhan is particularly striking some three months after cases were first publicly reported. People are now allowed to leave the city for the first time since the multi-month lockdown was imposed. In Italy and Spain, the number of coronavirus deaths now appears to be on a downward trend, albeit still at high rates of more than 500 a day. This is reinforced by news from Austria, where small shops, DIY stores and state parks will reopen from April 14 and, from May 1, all shops, shopping centers and hairdressers.

However, optimism that the tide, even in these select geographies, has decisively turned still may be premature on three main fronts.

Firstly, the fact remains that several key countries within these massive continents have almost certainly yet to hit their peak. Take the example of Indonesia, which on Monday confirmed 218 new coronavirus cases — its biggest daily jump yet — taking the total number of infections to about 2,500. For a country of more than 270 million people, it is

almost certain that these numbers will rise, potentially dramatically. This is also anticipated in the UK, where, with Prime Minister Boris Johnson sadly in intensive care in hospital, the virus is not forecast to peak until later this month.

Secondly, even when the coronavirus was presumed to have been under control in certain countries, especially in Asia, there have been discouraging signs that success with containment could be prone to at least partial reversal. South Korea, which has been widely praised for its actions in recent weeks after a significant initial peak in infections, has decided that new measures are needed, including requiring all foreign arrivals to quarantine in government facilities for two weeks.

Thirdly, all remaining restrictions are being rescinded only very cautiously. In China, officials are rightly concerned about a second wave of infections in Wuhan, as local health authorities step up the detection, monitoring and supervision of the virus.

A temporary ban on all foreign visitors also remains in place, even if they have residence permits or visas. Meanwhile, Chinese and foreign airlines can operate only a limited number of flights and no cabins can be more than three-quarters full.

In Western Europe too, caution is uppermost in people's minds. For instance, Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz warned on Monday that authorities could activate an “emergency brake” if infections accelerated once more, and said the coming days “will be decisive in whether the resurrection after Easter that we all want can take place.” Moreover, the government is extending its three-week-old restrictions on public movement until the end of April.

Such prudence is also prevailing in Germany, despite media speculation that restrictions could start to be lifted as soon as April 17. Chancellor Angela Merkel poured cold water on this suggestion on Monday, saying she is as anxious as anyone for life to return to normal in the country but that “we're still living in the pandemic” and now isn't the time to talk about an end date to restrictive measures.

Taken overall, while there are encouraging signs in parts of Asia and Europe, it is too early to predict that the worst of the coronavirus crisis is over, even in these areas. Moreover, even if the current optimism proves justified, urgent international attention will soon need to turn to other key areas of the world, including Africa and the Americas, where the peaks in many countries are still some time away.

Opinion

Palestinians' land rights crisis

RAY HANANIA

Since 1967, Israel has spent millions of shekels secretly buying up Palestinian lands in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem, a new study by the Israeli group Peace Now (PN) reports. Among those buying land are Jewish settler groups like Elad and Ateret Cohanim, as well as organizations associated with the state, such as Keren Kayemeth Lelsrael-the Jewish National Fund (KKL-JNF). When we talk about Israelis "purchasing" Palestinian lands, we are not talking about a free market system where the rights of the two sides are protected. Rather, Palestinians are being forced to sell their lands to Jewish groups and settlers. The bottom line is that these so-called land purchases are in fact land thefts and they must be stopped. Currently, most landowners are forced to hire their own lawyers in an attempt to resist Israel's efforts to steal these lands. But there are also laws prohibiting Palestinians from selling land to Israelis or Jews. Such sales are crimes punishable by death. While Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestinian Authority (PA) enforce the law, they have done little to help the Palestinians whose lands have been taken by Israel or who have been rebuffed in their attempts to establish legal claims under Israeli laws, which are written to help Israelis at the expense of Palestinians. This is a hypocrisy that must change. Every Palestinian has a land theft story — many even still hold the keys to their stolen properties. Some of my mother's family emigrated from Bethlehem prior to 1948 to escape a wave of violence waged by Zionist terror groups Irgun and the Stern Gang. Land they owned adjacent



to Jerusalem under the old Jordanian system was illegally annexed along with East Jerusalem on June 28, 1967. Although my family has hired lawyers, both Palestinian and Jewish, to establish a claim of ownership under Israeli law, the land remains in limbo. The old belief was that there would be peace, but that has not happened. The Arab world, which fought and lost the wars over the years, has failed to defend Palestinian land rights, and so has the PA. They have made a mockery of Land Day, which has been marked every March 30 since 1976, when Israeli police and soldiers shot dead six Palestinians who were protesting Israel's illegal expropriation of thousands of dunums of Palestinian-owned land. If the Palestinian leadership wants to keep rejecting peace with Israel, then it needs to step up to the plate and help Palestinian families fight for their land rights; not just in press releases, but in the courts too. No one has ever offered to help my family fight for our land. The Israeli roadblocks that prevent the conversion of Palestinian-owned land from the Jordanian system into the Israeli system are insurmountable for any one family on its own. Just as the Israelis set up agencies like KKL-JNF to fight for Jewish land rights, the Arab world needs to step in and create similar agencies to fight for the land rights of Palestinians.

Ray Hanania is an award-winning former Chicago City Hall political reporter and columnist. **Twitter:** @RayHanania

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Learning the lessons of the coronavirus pandemic

NIDHAL GUESSOUM

We can already see some long-term social effects of the coronavirus pandemic and we should start drawing lessons, or at least analyzing the events and actions of the last few months, to prepare for the next crisis. Because, let us make no mistake about this, there will be future crises caused by viruses or other things (nuclear reactor accidents, major economic recessions or problems we haven't even considered yet). Indeed, we had been warned by the cognoscenti about our lack of preparedness for a pandemic, but we did not listen; we let it happen, and most governments reacted badly. Perhaps now we should be more proactive. I leave aside obvious lessons like improving public health infrastructures. I will rather focus on other lessons, particularly the importance of digital infrastructure, which affects several major areas of society. The first lesson is the utmost importance of the internet in such crises, as it allows governments to communicate widely and take important actions, such as quickly switching entire education systems to effective online arrangements, including examinations. And places like China, where people could shop online for everything, including groceries, with just a few clicks on their smartphones, were able to implement full-fledged confinements of major cities for two months or more without any public disorder or catastrophes. There is no doubt that governments everywhere will work to strengthen their digital infrastructures to be ready in the future. The benefits will be immediate: First in commerce, with more activity and growth, and secondly in education, with "blended learning" (strengthening teaching and learning with online components) and novel solutions for remote lectures and examinations, international enrollment, and more. Another conclusion that has quickly been drawn from the current crisis is that in-person meetings can be greatly reduced — for better or for worse. Virtual meetings have allowed for the inclusion of collaborators who are located very far away and the meetings have tended to be much more efficient. It thus now seems certain that remote interactions, both professional and social, will become more and more frequent and will perhaps soon become the default solution.



There will be fewer in-person meetings, as even medical "visits" will become virtual consultations, more international collaborations, especially as real-time automated translation becomes a reality, and more people remotely "attending" events (lectures, conferences, concerts, etc.). I should perhaps say a few words about the prospect of real-time automated translation. Until now, meetings with international participants required everyone to use one language, thus limiting who could take part and with what content. However, software such as Google Meet and Blackboard Collaborate (and probably others) allow for real-time captioning, where the software types the spoken sentences on-screen. Going from there to having the statements automatically and immediately translated and shown on-screen in any language is just one step that could be performed with online software such as Google Translate. We could then have people who do not speak a common language who could still conduct a serious, technical meeting from all corners of the world. To be sure, there are downsides to this online-dominated, uber-virtual world. We humans are a social species and loneliness leads to depression and other ills. We need in-person interaction, handshakes, hugs, kisses, warmth and "quality time" together. Webcams and microphones cannot provide (all) that. Moreover, the same digital tools that allow governments to track the spread of infections (starting with the flu) also allow them to track and monitor people's physical movements and digital actions. In South Korea, a law was passed several years ago allowing the government to track those who get infected and send out that information to everyone in their area in order to try to limit and contain the spread of a virus. In China, facial recognition software is used every day on countless streets, not to mention inside buildings. Needless to say, this raises huge privacy issues. The coronavirus crisis hit the world suddenly and very hard. It forced us all to react with the tools that were at our disposal. It showed us the areas (public health in particular) where most countries had not prepared well. And it also showed us that digital infrastructures and tools can have huge impacts in such crises, as well as in normal times. Let us continue to draw conclusions and learn from this catastrophe so that we can handle future crises much better.

Nidhal Guessoum is a professor at the American University of Sharjah, UAE. **Twitter:** @NidhalGuessoum

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Gifted children need help if they are to change the world

SARA AL-MULLA

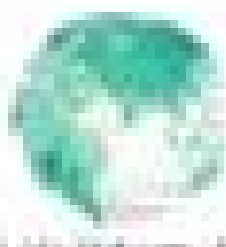
Appreciating a painting by Italian artist Leonardo da Vinci is a delightful experience. Born in 1452, Leonardo epitomized the spirit of the Renaissance and his interests encompassed the realms of art, architecture, sculpture, invention, mathematics, engineering, astronomy, botany, and science. As a young man, Leonardo showed a keen interest in the arts and his father, having recognized his talent, decided to apprentice him to one of Florence's most established painters and sculptors of the day, Andrea del Verrocchio. Leonardo went on to become one of the most influential and inspiring artists in history. A gifted individual is a gift to civilization and we have a responsibility to nurture their unique talents. Gifted children have an exceptional ability to learn information quickly, solve complex problems, use advanced vocabulary and communication skills, sustain detailed memories, and see the various connections and perspectives between different issues. Research conducted on gifted children shows stark differences in their development in comparison to their peers. Gifted students develop, both cognitively and emotionally, at a much faster pace than their peers. This means that they are more sensitive to their surroundings, perceptive of situations, and experience more emotional intensity. They are also intrinsically motivated to succeed, showing interest if learning activities and lessons are individualized and related to their passions. They are highly curious, often preferring to question and ponder ideas, rather than memorize and answer questions. Gifted children also tend to be introverted. That is why gifted students benefit tremendously from specially tailored education programs that aim to accelerate and enrich their



learning, enabling them to realize their potential. Schools need to offer customized learning experiences that cater to gifted students. First and foremost, schools need to put into place identification procedures to discover gifted students. Secondly, every school needs to have an expert in gifted education in order to provide the necessary programs and services to this group. Furthermore, teachers need to be trained in educating gifted students; from understanding their development to designing lessons in a way that nurtures their talents. Educational acceleration also allows students to complete the traditional curriculum at a faster rate. This includes grade-skipping, early entrance to kindergarten, school or university, and subject-based acceleration (which allows students to take subjects in higher grade levels). Grouping gifted students together also creates a positive learning experience. Furthermore, gifted students can attend out-of-school programs and specialized classes to advance their learning. Lastly, supporting parents through counselling and parenting programs can empower them to make the best choices for their gifted children. The Gifted Education Program in Singapore is a stellar case study. The model is based on a combination of curriculum enrichment, the advancement of essential skills, field trips, and specialized out-of-school learning experiences in partnership with tertiary institutions. For example, the Moot Parliament Program is a six-month mentorship project designed for secondary school students with the aim of educating them about democracy. The Innovation Program is another signature Singaporean project that focuses on encouraging gifted students to solve real-life problems. Gifted children have the opportunity to make the world a better place, but that can only be made possible if we invest in their education and learning experiences as early as possible.

Sara Al-Mulla is an Emirati civil servant with an interest in human development policy and children's literature.

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Business

ENERGY

Make or break days for global oil

Crunch talks set for this week between OPEC+ and G20 in bid to end crisis of overproduction and tumbling prices

Frank Kane Dubai

The global energy world, in the midst of a crisis as demand slumps to unprecedented levels due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, faces two days that could make — or break — the oil industry for months to come.

Leading producers from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), led by Saudi Arabia, were on Thursday scheduled to take part in virtual discussions with non-OPEC members, led by Russia, about a possible deal to revive the OPEC+ alliance that fell apart in Vienna at the beginning of last month.

Then, on Friday, energy ministers from the G20 nations, under the presidency of Saudi Arabia, will convene in another digital forum that will bring in the third important part of the global oil equation — the US, currently the biggest oil producer in the world.

If no deal is reached from the two days of oil summits, the immediate prospect looms of a further fall in crude prices and, with global storage facilities already filling rapidly, the possibility of major exporters “shutting in” oil fields, jeopardizing future production.

Energy experts say the purpose of the meetings is two-fold: To reach agreement on how to limit the vast quantities of oil that are still being produced even as demand collapses; and to present some kind of united front in geopolitical terms in the face of the biggest economic recession since the 1930s.

The most visible immediate sign of any success from the meetings will be an increase in the price of crude oil on global markets. Brent crude, the Middle East benchmark, has lost nearly half its value in the past month.

The first aim — to try to balance oil supply and demand — is the more difficult. Global demand has fallen by at least 20 percent from the usual daily consumption of around 100 million barrels, oil economists have calculated.

But, following the collapse of the OPEC+ deal that was putting a lid on supply, all producers have been pumping more crude. Saudi Arabia is producing more than 12 million barrels per day (bpd), a bigger vol-



Excess production coupled with rapidly diminishing storage space may see oil pumps switched off, jeopardizing future production, if a deal cannot be reached. Shutterstock

ume than at any time in its history. All OPEC members, as well as Russia, have said they will increase output.

In this stand-off, US President Donald Trump intervened last week to say that he had spoken to Saudi and Russian leaders and that he “expected” a cut of 10 million, possibly even 15 million, bpd.

That looks like wishful thinking. For one thing, it would not rebalance markets. Anas Al-Hajji, managing partner of US-based Energy Outlook Advisers, said: “The amount of the cut is relatively small given the major drop in demand.”

There are also some difficult relationships to smooth over in the

OPEC+ alliance. Saudi Arabia and Russia exchanged angry statements last weekend, each accusing the other of starting the oil price war. Iran, with big reserves but hampered by US sanctions from exporting in large quantities, said that it might not take part in the conference.

The choreography of the two meetings also presents hurdles. The US will not be present at the OPEC+ meeting, but the US Secretary of Energy Dan Brouillette said he would take part in the G20 event.

Because it is a free-market industry, the US cannot order its oil producers to reduce output, but most

FASTFACT

Saudi Arabia is producing more than 12 million barrels per day, a bigger volume than at any time in its history.

analysts are agreed any attempt to rebalance global supply would be impossible without it.

By going first, Saudi Arabia and Russia are “playing blind” without knowing what the Americans are thinking. Neither would want to agree big price-restoring cuts only for US producers — under big financial pressure at current levels — to swoop back into the market.

This week there have been some signs that the Americans are considering their own versions of cutbacks. The biggest US company, Exxon Mobil, said it would reduce capital expenditure on future projects by 30 percent; the US Energy Information Administration said oil production would fall by nearly 1 million bpd this year, in response to falling demand and financial pressures.

But even if the Saudis and Russians cut substantially alongside other big OPEC producers such as the UAE, and the Americans enter a long-term pattern of falling demand, it is still hard to see how cuts could reach the 10 million

barrels Trump “expects,” let alone 15 million.

J. P. Morgan, the big US investment bank, said that it expects OPEC+ to come up with combined cuts of about 4.3 million barrels, most of that coming from Saudi Arabia, Russia and the UAE. “If it’s 4.3 million it only puts off the day when global storage gets filled completely,” said Robin Mills, CEO of Qamar Energy consultancy.

Storage facilities are nearly at full capacity. Malek Azizeh, director of the premium facilities at the Fujairah Oil Terminal in the UAE, joked that he was going to hang a sign on the terminal gates: “Thanks, but no tanks.”

CORONAVIRUS

Bahrain to pay private sector salaries as Gulf struggles to shield migrant workers

Reuters Dubai

Bahrain will spend \$570 million on paying salaries to all 100,000 of its citizens employed in the private sector from April to June to mitigate the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), the labor ministry said on Wednesday.

The government of Bahrain, the least wealthy among Gulf Arab oil producers, will also pay electricity and water bills for all Bahraini citizens and businesses and will extend some tax breaks on properties and tourism, it said in a statement.

“Bahrain has set up an electronic platform where businessmen will start subscribing on April 8 to

benefit from the government’s plan to pay workers in the private sector,” the labor ministry said in a statement sent to Reuters.

The initiative is part of a \$11 billion stimulus package announced by Bahrain last month.

Regional governments have announced stimulus packages to support their economies as they implement drastic measures to combat the new coronavirus, including suspending passenger flights, imposing curfews and closing most public venues.

The total number of cases in the six Gulf Arab states has steadily risen to pass 9,000, with 67 deaths. The UAE has seen its count more than double since April 1.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Bahrain to pay private sector salaries, utility bills.
- Oman says spread among migrant workers poses challenge.
- Coronavirus cases in Gulf Arab region pass 9,000.

“Our biggest challenge is among expatriate workers,” Omani Health Minister Ahmed Bin Mohammed Al-Saidi told a local radio station, adding that Omani authorities would ramp up testing as the number of cases was expected to peak this month.



Bahrain’s \$11 billion stimulus package will see all private sector workers’ wages covered by the state for the next three months. Reuters

Oman, like other Gulf states, has locked down an area with a large population of low-wage foreign workers, who make up the bulk of the region’s labor force. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have urged Gulf states to protect migrant workers, many of whom live in overcrowded accommodation which makes it difficult for them to social distance.

Saidi said the coastal commercial district of Muttrah, sealed off last week, had the biggest spread of infections and authorities would

start random testing there. He added that Oman had secured lab equipment and protective gear from China.

Oman has the lowest number of cases among Gulf states at 419 while the UAE has the second highest after much larger neighbor Saudi Arabia, with counts of 2,359 and 2,795 respectively.

Saudi Arabia has imposed a 24-hour curfew in major cities including Riyadh. Dubai, the region’s business hub, has imposed a full curfew and closed off Al

Ras district where many migrant workers live and work.

Authorities in the UAE capital Abu Dhabi and in Dubai are using some hotels to monitor people with minor cases of COVID-19, the respiratory disease caused by the new coronavirus, two sources with direct knowledge of the matter told Reuters.

UAE federal, Abu Dhabi government and Dubai government media offices have not responded to Reuters requests for comment on capacity at health facilities.

Business News

MEDIA

#Stayhome: Gulf influencers take the glamor factor indoors

Many have turned the cameras on their lives at home as they spend time with family, cooking and decorating

AFP Dubai

From extravagant trips to the Amalfi Coast and sunset photoshoots on Dubai's beaches to an almost complete lockdown — the coronavirus has forced the Gulf's social media influencers indoors, but hasn't lowered their glamor factor.

While they can no longer upload pictures of themselves zipping through international airports or strutting down London streets in high-end brands, many have turned the cameras on their lives at home as they spend time with family, cooking and decorating.

Most have encouraged their followers to as well, as the number of coronavirus cases in the oil-rich Gulf, home to millions of foreigners, rises past 9,000s.

Others have given their audiences a look into their personal lives.

Kuwaiti beauty-salon owner and style queen Fouz Al-Fahad shared images of her March 17 marriage

ceremony, showing her smiling as she received an enormous diamond ring from her new husband amid a lavish backdrop of white flowers.

While few people were in attendance — in line with social distancing rules — Al-Fahad's three million Instagram followers were virtual guests.

"Thank you for making us forget the coronavirus even if it just for one day ... how lovely you are as your hands shake when putting on the rings. My eyes teared up, I love you, Fouz," said one follower.

In the past year, Instagram influencers have played a big part in promoting events in the Gulf, especially in Saudi Arabia which has been touting its tourism and entertainment industries as it diversifies its economy away from oil.

But cultural and sporting events have been scrapped across the region as governments try to curb the spread of the pandemic, leaving influencers scrambling for content.

"It's not easy for one to create content and attract thousands ... and millions, it takes a lot of dedi-



A girl looks at the Instagram page of Fouz Al-Fahad, a Kuwaiti beauty salon owner and social media influencer. AFP

cation," said Joelle Mardinian, a Dubai-based influencer and founder of beauty brand Joelle Group, in one of her Instagram stories.

"From the morning I think 'what can I upload for you,'" she said.

"I like to share with you nice things, such as playing with (my son) ... or if my daughter is doing something cute, or if I cooked something I'm proud of," she told her more than 12 million followers. Mardinian has encouraged her

followers to "find things to do at home" as she posts content ranging from whipping up a dish, to refurbishing outdoor furniture in her garden.

Also making guest appearances were her dogs, including one that had a bedazzling pink collar.

"I was proud of myself, and I also wanted to encourage you, not only for the sake of content. You are always on mind," she said. Social media influencers can

BACKGROUND

Some sociologists believe social media influencers can have a positive impact on people during pandemics by providing a diversion for those in isolation.

play a positive role during the pandemic, said Rima Sabban, an associate professor of sociology at Zayed University in the UAE.

"They can help, even with the little things," she told AFP.

But she urged influencers to drop their "social masks" and avoid putting such a gloss on the situation that it makes ordinarily people even more miserable about their locked-in existences.

"At this time it is important to be honest with people," she said. "This is now a moment for humanity ... to drop these masks and be courageous."

Ragda Bakhorji, a Saudi with more than 14,000 followers on Instagram, said now was the time to bring "authenticity" to the forefront.

"Generally, my posts reflect my

daily activities with a focus on sarcasm and social matters, that raises curiosity and allows my followers to come to their own conclusions," she told AFP.

"I think it's important to be honest and authentic, especially at this time when we should focus more on humanity and be considerate, rather than focus on trivial stuff."

For Souad Naim, a marketing manager in Dubai, social media figures in the Gulf have been a reliable source of entertainment as well as inspiration.

"I check my phone in the morning and in the evening, and I like to see what the influencers are planning for the day or what they did already," the 35-year-old told AFP.

"When I see something I like, I get inspired."

Her favorite figures have changed tack dramatically during the crisis, she said, adding: "I'm enjoying their live discussions with their followers and how they're adapting to the circumstances and making home-cooked dishes."

"There aren't many things to do now, so it's entertaining."



An elderly man shops at a supermarket in Lebanon during a countrywide lockdown to prevent the spread of the coronavirus disease. Reuters

ECONOMY

Lebanon import woes deepen as supply chains buckle under coronavirus

Reuters Beirut

Lebanon's food importers, already hit by a dollar crunch, have struggled to hook new cargoes as the coronavirus pandemic threatens supplies and sparks fears of even more painful price hikes.

Vendors are delaying shipments and refusing new orders as the spread of the virus slows global food supply chains.

This comes at a grim time for Lebanon. A financial crisis has wiped out about half the value of the currency and sent prices skyrocketing for months.

Supply disruptions, twinned with the currency squeeze, risk fueling more inflation as poverty

levels rise. Prices of consumer goods have nearly doubled in the past six months.

Food importers like Hani Bohsali said pressure was piling on stocks, already reduced by banking controls.

Last week, Bohsali was told Moroccan sardines were no longer available after fishermen stopped going out — and even if they did, tins from Spain were running thin. Before that, a cooking oil shipment from Ukraine and lentils from Australia were each postponed a month because of labor shortages.

"Everything is slowing down and I fear that globally, the worst is yet to come," he said.

As major state buyers from Saudi

Arabia to Egypt look to beef up strategic stocks, for the first time in years Lebanon is thinking of importing wheat.

Economy Minister Raoul Nehme told Reuters the Cabinet had authorized importing 80,000 tons.

"It is just a measure to be ready in case we need it," he said.

The government has warned that foreign currency reserves plummeted to "dangerous" levels, pledging to keep them for key goods: Wheat, fuel and medicine.

Buyers of staples like grains worry other countries will hold back shipments as the pandemic drags on or choose not to prioritize the small nation of around six million.

"The interruptions because of the

lack of cash dollars, the lockdowns abroad, we're going to see the impact in two months," said Nabil Fahed, an importer who heads the supermarket syndicate. "The supplies will not be there...I'm really worried about this."

With a tiny industrial sector and scant natural resources, Lebanon's economy produces few goods.

Fahed, who owns a major supermarket chain, said prices for most goods have risen 45-50 percent, with some already running out.

Any harsher shortages could still be a few months off. Importers put stocks of most goods at 1-2 months and supermarkets remain largely full despite some panic shopping during Lebanon's shutdown.

EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE

Iran presses for IMF loan; some business to stay shut despite easing

Reuters Dubai

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani pressed hard on Wednesday for a \$5 billion emergency International Monetary Fund loan to fight the Middle East's worst coronavirus outbreak, saying the IMF would be guilty of discrimination if it withheld the money.

Rouhani also said some businesses will remain closed until further notice, after the authorities announced last week that they will begin to ease a shut-down order from April 11.

Iran's central bank wrote last month to the International Monetary Fund to request the \$5 billion from its Rapid Financing Initiative, an emergency program that aids countries faced with sudden shocks such as natural disasters. It was Tehran's first request for IMF aid since Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution.

"I urge international organizations to fulfil their duties. We are a member of the IMF," Rouhani said at a televised cabinet meeting. "There should be no discrimination in giving loans," Rouhani added, saying such discrimination would be unacceptable.

In a tweet on Sunday, the secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, Ali Shamkhani, accused the US of blocking Tehran's loan request from the IMF.

Iran has banned intercity travel and shut non-essential businesses to fight an outbreak that according to official figures has killed 4,003 people and infected 67,286.

The authorities have said some businesses whose operations do not create a big risk of spreading the virus will be allowed to reopen from Saturday. They have not given a detailed explanation of

FAST FACTS

- Iran's central bank wrote last month to the International Monetary Fund to request the \$5 billion from its Rapid Financing Initiative.
- Request is Tehran's first request for IMF aid since Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution.
- IMF in talks with Iran aimed at understanding country's needs and what is required for the loan request to be processed.

which businesses fall into that category.

"But high-risk businesses will remain closed until further notice," Rouhani said. "We should continue fighting the disease while our economic activities continue as much as possible."

An IMF official has said the Fund is in dialogue with Iran, with talks aimed at understanding Iran's needs and what is required for the loan request to be processed.

The coronavirus outbreak has further damaged Iran's economy, already battered by US sanctions, reimposed since 2018 when Washington exited an agreement to lift them in return for curbs to Iran's nuclear program.

Tehran has blamed the US and its "maximum pressure" policy for restricting Iran's ability to respond effectively to the virus.

"The US sanctions on Iran are economic and medical terrorism ... They are in violation of international medical conventions," Rouhani said.

US officials have said that the sanctions do not target medicine for Iran and Washington had offered to help Tehran face the outbreak. Iran has dismissed the offer as ridiculous.

Business News



Italy's industrial north has borne the brunt of the coronavirus outbreak, with business groups warning that the economy faces 'incalculable' damage. Reuters

ECONOMY

Impossible dilemma? World watches Italy as businesses plead to return to work

Government urged to come up with a strategy for a gradual exit from lockdown

Reuters Rome

Many Italian companies and academics are pressing the government to reopen factories to prevent an economic catastrophe, as the world watches how the first Western country to impose a lockdown can extricate itself from the unprecedented measures.

The same debate is being held around the globe: How long and stringently can bans to combat the coronavirus pandemic be held in place before irreversible damage is wrought, with businesses sunk and swathes of the population jobless?

Italy faces among the most pressing dilemmas, not only because its lockdown has been in place longer than most nations and it has the world's highest death toll, but because the novel coronavirus has hit hardest in the northern industrial heartlands that generate a third of its economic output.

"How can I pay wages if I do not make money? How can I keep American clients if I am not in the position to respect any contracts?" said Giulia Svegliado, CEO of Celent, a producer of industrial insulating panels with 50 employees in the northern town of Padua.

About 150 Italian academics have published a letter in financial daily *Il Sole-24 Ore*, owned by the Italian business lobby Confindustria, urging the government to unblock the economy.

"The social and economic consequences would risk producing irreversible damage, probably more serious than those caused by the virus itself," the letter said.

Rome imposed a nationwide lockdown on March 9 when the new virus, which emerged in China, had already killed more than 460 people. Two weeks later, Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte announced that non-essential businesses, including car, clothing and furniture production, would have to close until April 3.

The death toll has risen relentlessly and now stands at more than 16,500. The government extended the restrictions last week until

April 13 and is widely expected to extend them again, for another three weeks.

However the smallest daily rise in coronavirus deaths for nearly two weeks on Saturday, and the first fall in the number of patients in intensive care, have fed hopes that the epidemic might have reached a peak in Italy and focused attention on the next phase in the crisis.

Most businesses appreciate the need for lockdowns to safeguard public health. After all, if bans are lifted before the spread of the virus is curbed, people may not have confidence to leave their homes and engage in commerce.

The World Health Organization on Tuesday urged countries not to lift restrictions prematurely.

"One of the most important parts is not to let go of the measures too early in order not to have a fall back again," said spokesman Christian Lindmeier. "It's similar to being sick yourself if you get out of bed too early and get running too early you risk falling back and having complications."

What worries many in Italy, and elsewhere, is the apparent lack of authoritative plans on how to safely lift measures, as governments wrestle with an unforeseen, invisible and unfamiliar foe and scientific guidance evolves on a weekly basis.

Companies in the euro zone's third-largest economy are pushing for the government to come up with a strategy for a gradual exit from the lockdown.

"I expect government to set strict rules on security and then give us the possibility to go back to work," said Stefano Iluaro, founder of Sertech Elettronica, a producer of electro-mechanical, electronic and software components in Vicenza.

So far, officials have said that work restrictions would probably be lifted on a sector-by-sector rather than geographical basis.

HIGHLIGHTS

Italy was first Western country to impose a lockdown. Now businesses are urging the government to reopen factories.

WHO cautions nations against lifting measures too early.

Same question being asked in nations around world: How long until bans cause irreversible economic damage?

Social distancing, wider use of personal protection devices such as face masks and strengthened local health systems have also been spoken about.

Testing and "contact tracing" will be extended, including with the use of smartphone apps and other forms of digital technology, following the South Korean playbook.

Vicenza and Padua are part of Veneto, one of the worst affected regions of Italy along with Lombardy and Emilia Romagna. The high density of factories and strong economic ties with China have

A member of the Italian Civil Protection shows a protective suit from China. Reuters



been put forward as possible reasons behind the epidemic there.

"We say this very loudly to the authorities: 'Hurry up,'" said Cesare Mastrolanni, vice president of Absolute, a luxury yachts producer of Piacenza, Emilia Romagna. "The shutdown has already done incalculable damage."

Trade unions have threatened to strike unless the government keeps non-core activities down. Protect health over wealth, they say — and while many companies are pushing the government for a plan to reopen factories, they won't risk their staff.

"I am full of orders, but I cannot reopen as long as there is a risk that employees may get sick. I will reopen when the responsible bodies decide that it can be done," said Gaetano Bergami, founder of BMC, a producer of air filters for the motorcycle and automotive industries with 100 employees.

With Italy's gross domestic product (GDP) expected to fall by 6 percent this year, according to Confindustria's forecast, public debt spiking towards 150 percent of GDP and thousands of people asking for state-backed income support schemes, pressure is growing on Conte to come up with a detailed blueprint for recovery.

"We can't wait for everything to pass. If we stay closed people will starve," former Prime Minister Matteo Renzi, leader of the centrist ruling party Italia Viva, said.

Authorities in northern Italy have begun testing health workers for antibodies that may help identify individuals with immunity to the coronavirus. The aim would be to allow authorities to issue "licences" for individuals with proven immunity to the virus to return to work.

Franco Locatelli, head of Italy's Higher Health Council, said a reliable antibody test would give a better picture of the extent of Italy's epidemic.

However, it would probably take another month before health authorities can issue recommendations on a plan for nationwide testing, Locatelli said.

BizBriefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Manufacturing

German, Swiss firms combine to make disinfectant

Businesses including Switzerland's Clariant and Germany's CropEnergies are combining to boost disinfectant production, part of a state-financed crisis program in Bavaria to lift supplies amid the coronavirus pandemic.

CropEnergies, which has been expanding its alcohol production volumes, will deliver it to Clariant's factory in Gendorf on the German-Austrian border. The Swiss company will start monthly production of 2 million liters of disinfectant.

Their efforts support the southern German state's program aiming to make 10 million liters of disinfectant over the next three months for hospitals and clinics facing short supplies. Demand has skyrocketed due to the coronavirus outbreak and Clariant said it offered its contribution at cost price.

Reuters

Travel

German tourism giant TUI seals €1.8bn state loan

Tourism giant TUI on Wednesday said it signed an agreement for a €1.8 billion loan from the German government to help keep it afloat as the coronavirus batters the travel industry.

The bridging loan equivalent to \$1.99 billion will be issued through German public lender KfW and be used to bolster TUI's credit line.

"KfW and TUI AG confirm the signing of the state aid bridging loan for €1.8 billion," the group said in a statement.

It is one of the biggest examples yet of German companies making use of a huge government rescue package aimed at cushioning the impact of the pandemic on Europe's top economy.

Global lockdowns to stem the spread of the virus have paralyzed holiday travel, forcing TUI's hotels, flights and cruise ships to stay empty.

AFP

Chart of THE DAY

A global lockdown has seen the price of carbon dioxide emissions tumble in Europe and elsewhere as production slows.

Source: Bank of America Merrill Lynch

EUROPEAN CO2 PRICES

EUA carbon emission prices (\$/ton)



GadgetWatch

TECH TIPS FOR THE SHORT OF TIME

Garmin Vivo Fit 3

A cheap alternative to the more expensive FitBit end of the market, this fitness tracker is ideal for lockdown fitness tracking. You can set your own personalized goal and it automatically records your daily activities for later review and analysis on Garmin Connect. It monitors calories, distance and intensity minutes among other things.

From about \$50.



Retail

Tesco recruits 45,000 staff on virus demand

Britain's biggest retailer Tesco said on Tuesday that it recruited over 45,000 staff in the past two weeks as the coronavirus outbreak sparked a stockpiling surge while many supermarket workers fell ill.

In an earnings update, Tesco said costs were forecast to increase by between £650 million and £925 million (\$787 million and \$1.12 billion) on "significant cost increases in payroll, distribution and store expenses."

CEO Dave Lewis said "The coronavirus has shown how critical the food supply chain is to the UK," but he noted that "initial panic buying has subsided."

Tesco said that "more than 45,000 new colleagues" joined since March 20, including drivers meeting soaring demand for home deliveries.

"In the first few weeks of the crisis, significant panic buying cleared the supply chain of certain items," it said.

AFP

Construction

UK homebuilder launches advance payment scheme

British homebuilder Taylor Wimpey will make advance payments to subcontractors for work to be completed in future under a new scheme aimed at propping up self-employed workers forced to stay home by the coronavirus lockdown.

The company, Britain's third-largest builder of new homes, said the "Pay It Forward" scheme aimed to support tradesmen waiting for government aid payouts or who did not qualify for them, and sought to prevent the kind of financial collapse which many experienced after the 2008 financial crisis.

Payments would be made only to contractors who have a long-term relationship with the company, it said.

"Supporting those we rely on is not only the right thing to do, but will help ensure we emerge from the coronavirus pandemic in the best possible place," CEO Pete Redfern said.

Reuters

We at ACWA Power believe it is crucial to do what we can to support the community and demonstrate our commitment to KSA.

Mohammad Abunayyan
Chairman of ACWA Power



Corporate

PRESS RELEASES FROM THE WORLD OF BUSINESS AND COMMERCE



ACWA Power, a leading developer, owner, and operator of power generation and water desalination plants, has deployed its human and technical expertise in the fight against COVID-19.

COMMITMENT TO HEALTH EFFORTS

ACWA Power pledges SR50m for COVID-19

ACWA Power has pledged a contribution of SR50 million (\$13 million) to support national health endeavors and efforts, in wake of the preventive measures taken by the Saudi leadership and official local authorities to contain the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mohammad bin Abdullah Abunayyan, chairman of ACWA Power, said: "Since the emergence of the COVID-19 outbreak, our Saudi leadership has made extraordinary efforts to ensure the health and safety of our country, citizens and residents are safeguarded. The preventative measures and prompt action taken by the Kingdom to combat the consequences of the pandemic embody a com-

mendable response. In light of the urgency of the matter, we at ACWA Power believe it is crucial to do what we can to support the community and demonstrate our social commitment to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

"ACWA Power is fully aligned with the Saudi Ministry of Health to support its efforts in addressing the repercussions of this global health crisis, and have submitted a proposal to develop and construct a mobile hospital that is fully equipped with the necessary medical tools and equipment."

Abunayyan added: "We are cooperating closely with all local authorities in the Kingdom to support their tireless efforts in

HIGHLIGHT

ACWA Power's contribution represents its firm commitment to supporting and collaborating with the governments and official bodies, who are exerting their best efforts to face the crisis and combat its consequences.

containing the spread and impact of this pandemic, and have hence volunteered deploying ACWA Power's human and technical expertise toward the quick establishment of suitable facilities that require the highest standards of safety and security."

He pointed out that the company is in full compliance with the measures taken by the official local authorities, not only in the Kingdom but in 12 countries where the company operates.

"Additionally, we are committed to implementing all preventive and precautionary measures to safeguard the health and safety of our people, while continuing our mission of providing vital water and power services. We are maintaining an efficient operation of all our plants in Saudi Arabia, and internationally, with the highest standards of safety and security," Abunayyan said.

"The COVID-19 pandemic necessitates mobilizing the expertise

and capabilities of the private sector to carry out its duties and responsibilities toward peoples and societies. This is a time for collaboration between the private sector and governments to overcome the impact of the current crisis, contributing effectively to strengthening and enhancing the infrastructure and basic facilities that secure peoples' lives and sustainable, economic and social development plans," he added.

ACWA Power's contribution represents its firm commitment to supporting and collaborating with the governments and official bodies, who are exerting their best efforts to face the crisis and combat its consequences.

Corporate Briefs

THE BEST OF THE BEST

Financial Support

\$13.6m RAKEZ fund to boost business continuity

Ras Al-Khaimah Economic Zone (RAKEZ) has launched customized bundles of incentives with a total value of 50 million dirhams (\$13.6 million) to ease the impact of the current global situation for its family of more than 15,000 companies and reinforce their business continuity. The incentives comprise various discounts on fees, waiver of penalties and fees as well as flexible installment options.

"Our clients are at the heart of everything we do, and now more than ever, we are here for them," said Sheikh Ahmed bin Saqr Al-Qasimi, chairman of RAKEZ. "We understand that these uncertain times present unique challenges to different businesses, so we decided not to rush and launch unevaluated incentives. Instead, we took the time to study the situation from our clients' perspective — what challenges each sector is facing and how we can lessen their burdens. With the allocation of this 50 million dirhams support fund, we make it possible to customize bundles of benefits based on each clients' need to boost their business stability."

Economic Impact

Visa Foundation commits \$210m for small businesses

The Visa Foundation has announced a commitment of two programs totaling \$210 million to support small and micro businesses. The move aligns with the foundation's long-term focus on women's economic advancement and inclusive economic development, and to address an urgent need from local communities following the spread of COVID-19.

The first program of \$10 million is designated for immediate emergency relief to support charitable organizations on the frontlines responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, such as public health and food relief, in each of the five geographic regions in which Visa operates: North America; Latin America and the Caribbean; Europe; Asia Pacific; and Central Europe, Middle East and Africa.

The second program is a five-year, strategic \$200 million commitment to support small and micro businesses around the world, with a focus on fostering women's economic advancement.

Automobile

General Motors extends warranty & support services

To postpone any nonvital servicing trips for its customers, General Motors is taking proactive measures alongside Aljomaiah Automotive Company, official Cadillac, Chevrolet and GMC dealer, and Universal Motors Agencies Company, official Chevrolet and GMC dealer, to better serve the Saudi community during these uncertain times.

Aligning with government directives to stay home in light of the ongoing situation, General Motors has teamed up with Aljomaiah and Universal Motors to alleviate any additional worries from its customers, by extending warranties on all Cadillac, Chevrolet and GMC vehicles. Any customer who has a GM vehicle with warranty expiring between March 1 and May 31 will have their warranty extended by two months.

COMMUTING

Abu Dhabi launches free bus service for medical workers

Via, a company that provides digital infrastructure to power public mobility in cities around the world, has launched a new on-demand essential transportation system in Abu Dhabi to provide free rides for medical workers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The service is powered by Via and deployed in partnership with transport operator United Trans and Abu Dhabi's Integrated Transport Center (ITC) of the Department of Municipalities and Transport. It aims to provide the city's essential health care workers a safe and reliable way to travel between their home and place of work during the coronavirus public health crisis.

As an appreciation for health care workers in the city, Abu Dhabi Healthcare Link is completely free, courtesy of ITC. Employees can simply enter a rider code provided by their hospital in the mobile app, and they will instantly be able to book a ride to and from their home and place of work. The new on-demand transportation service is available from 6 p.m. to 8 a.m., as fixed-route public transportation is scaled back as a preventative measure to limit the spread of coronavirus.

Using the new Abu Dhabi



Using the new Abu Dhabi Healthcare Link app medical employees will be able to hail a 14-seat Mercedes-Benz Sprinter directly from their smartphone.

Healthcare Link app (iOS and Android), medical employees will be able to hail a 14-seat Mercedes-Benz Sprinter directly from their smartphone.

"Getting critical staff to work reliably and safely has never been more important," said Daniel Ramot, co-founder and CEO of Via. "Digitally enabled transport services like the Abu Dhabi Healthcare Link can play a key role in allowing public transport to adapt to demand amidst rapidly changing situations. We are proud to

apply our technology and operational expertise to support essential mobility for critical health care workers in Abu Dhabi during these challenging times."

"UAE has always led by example and this new service is no exception. We are going through unprecedented times, and we hope that this new service will support the health care staff that are tirelessly working round the clock to help save lives," said Ahmad bin Elsa Alserkal, chairman of United Trans.

ONLINE BANKING

SABB thanks customers for going digital during pandemic

SABB, the Kingdom's third largest bank, saw its monthly app downloads soar 27 percent following a campaign encouraging customers to go digital and avoid branches. The bank acted as part of an industry-wide push, encouraging customers to avoid unnecessary branch visits to reduce the risk of the coronavirus infection. The bank targeted customers who were not active on their app or online banking through social media and more than 500,000 text messages.

Naif Alabdulkareem, deputy managing director, retail banking and wealth management, SABB, said: "I'd like to thank all our customers who made the switch to digital and helped reduce unnecessary traffic at our branches. We're all in this together, so I'm really proud of and grateful to our customers for answering our call. Right now, our priorities are keeping people safe and providing access to critical services."

Like all banks in the Kingdom, SABB is operating a reduced branch network to prevent the spread of the virus. The re-

duced network will support urgent transactions that can only be made at branches. While many customers have already switched to the convenience of digital banking, there are still some using branches for things they could do on their phone. The bank will continue its campaign to raise awareness of digital services to reduce traffic at branches.

SABB now has a top-rated banking app following a recent upgrade, adding more than 30 new services, such as Face ID, Apple Pay and an improved dashboard for better money management. The upgrade came after SABB legally merged with Alawwal Bank, where it promised to connect customers to the best digital banking experience in the Kingdom.

Alabdulkareem added: "Innovation is a core value for our newly combined bank and we're excited about having greater resources to invest in the best of banking technology for customers. This pandemic is teaching us all the value in building digital capability and will only accelerate our plans to digitize our business further."

Naif Alabdulkareem, deputy managing director, retail banking and wealth management, SABB.



Sport News

SUMMER OLYMPICS

Tokyo Olympic flame taken off display; next stop unclear

The flame is expected to reappear next year in Japan for the torch relay

AP Tokyo

The Tokyo Olympic flame has been taken off public display in Japan. And it's not clear when it will reappear again or where — or under what conditions.

The flame arrived in Japan from Greece on March 26. After the Tokyo Olympics and the torch relay were postponed until next year, the flame was put on display in the northeastern prefecture of Fukushima. It was to remain on display through the end of April.

It was removed after several days when Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Tuesday issued a state of emergency in order to combat the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), which includes limiting large crowds.

"Tokyo 2020 will now keep the flame in an undisclosed location



People take pictures with the Olympic Flame in Fukushima City, Japan. Files/ AP

to prevent people from gathering," Tokyo organizers said in a statement to The Associated Press.

Tokyo organizers are expected to keep the flame for the short term. In the long term, the flame is expected

to be used by the International Olympic Committee as a promotion device and as a symbol of the fight against the pandemic.

"The idea will be to keep this flame burning and showing it to

HIGHLIGHT

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the world," Michael Payne, the former marketing director of the IOC, told the AP in a recent interview.

The flame is expected to reappear next year in Japan for the torch relay. But Payne, who no longer works for the IOC, hinted it could have a wider purpose.

"The Olympic flame burning will provide a very powerful inspiration, a bright light as the world goes through these difficult times," he said.

Prior to the 2008 Beijing

Olympics, Chinese organizers and the IOC organized an international torch relay that went to about 20 countries.

The worldwide tour was met by violent protests against China's human rights record in Tibet and elsewhere. The flame was targeted at several stops including London, Paris and San Francisco. This forced organizers to reroute the relay to separate protesters and supporters.

The chaos at the time was described as a "crisis" for the IOC by then-President Jacques Rogge. The IOC subsequently canceled any future plans for a worldwide display of the flame.

Any plan next year to take the flame on a world tour, or even a tour of Japan, will depend on the evolution of the virus. The same is true for holding the Olympics amid large crowds in just under 16 months.

COMMENTARY

The Masters in November is better than no Masters at all

AP New York

C.T. Pan could become a footnote in history at Augusta National. Imagine qualifying for his first Masters and then having to wait 571 days before he can hear the most understated announcement in golf.

"Fore, please. C.T. Pan now driving."

One week after Tiger Woods slipped on a fifth green jacket, Pan won the RBC Heritage at Hilton Head to qualify for the Masters the following April.

And now April is November.

Charles Howell III has a strong bias, having grown up a few miles away from Augusta National, but he speaks for the majority when he says, "Any Masters is better than no Masters."

Monday's announcement of the reconfigured schedule offered no guarantees, only something to anticipate.

And that's going to have to suffice for now, considering no one is even sure when golf or any other sport will resume because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It's nice to put the carrots out there in front of us," Graeme McDowell said Tuesday.

The PGA Championship in August? That's where it used to be. The US Open in September? It's happened before, though not in the last 107 years.

The Masters in November is what stands out.

Augusta National is all about white dogwoods and pink azaleas. The Masters is a sure signal of spring, complemented by the opening week of Major League Baseball.

It was supposed to end on Easter Sunday. Not it will start two weeks before Thanksgiving. Tiger Woods had planned on serving steak and chicken fajitas, and sushi out on the deck of the clubhouse. Does he switch to turkey and dressing?

The Masters is scheduled for Nov. 12-15. Mobile devices are not allowed on the grounds during tournament days, meaning no one will be looking at their phones to check football scores. Will the locals with season badges give up Saturday's third round and head to Athens to watch Georgia play

Tennessee, or to Atlanta to see Notre Dame play Georgia Tech?

Kevin Kisner once left Atlanta after the third round of the Tour Championship, two shots off the lead, to take a helicopter to Georgia's game against Mississippi State. Would he leave the Masters to see Georgia play Tennessee?

"I would not," he said.

These are the kind of nuances never presented at a Masters.

Spring blooms will give way to fall foliage, making it a different kind of Masters. The weather can be an issue, but that's true in April. Think back to 2007 when the wind chill never got higher than 47 degrees for the third round, and the scoring was the highest since 1956.

As for the course?

Trevor Immelman, who won the 2008 Masters, has played

FASTREAD

The PGA Championship in August? That's where it used to be. The US Open in September? It's happened before, though not in the last 107 years. The Masters in November is what stands out.

in November. He knows what Augusta National can do, which seems to be just about anything.

The club closes every year in May — it closed in March this year due to the new coronavirus — and the grass goes dormant until it is overseeded with rye ahead of the reopening in October.

Chairman Fred Ridley said Augusta National "identified" Nov. 12-15 as the intended dates. Was that because the later date improved chances of a return to normal in sports, or because an extra month would allow the course to be the best it can be? Maybe a little of both.

"I don't think it would be all that different other than the obvious aesthetic differences between spring and fall," Immelman said. "The massive wild card is Mother Nature ... That change in temperature along with the possibility of that northerly wind that can blow



Tiger Woods celebrates after winning the Masters at Augusta National last year. Files/Reuters

is going to be the big difference."

He said three of the par 5s — all but No. 2 — could have wind in the face, perhaps limiting eagles or birdies.

"I do think playing it in November — and I've done that many times — the scoring won't quite be as low as what we're used to over the last few years," he said.

The winner still gets a green jacket and a lifetime exemption.

The Masters not only set a new date, it filled out its field

— 96 players, regardless of what happens until November. Four players were added to the field by being among the top 50 in the world — McDowell, Collin Morikawa, Scottie Scheffler and Christiaan Bezuidenhout.

McDowell was No. 51 in the world when he missed the cut at Bay Hill, and after The Players Championship was canceled, he went up to No. 49. That was due to a number of factors, which includes a reduction in events played over two years. It's complicated. The phone call was not.

His phone rang 20 minutes after news of the November dates.

McDowell saw the 706 area code — Augusta — and wisely answered.

"He said, 'I've got good news: You're in,'" said McDowell, who last played at Augusta in 2016. "I felt fortunate they decided to honor the cutoff date. I'm excited to get back to my first Masters in a while."

Now he has to wait seven months, and then hope golf resumes.

"I suppose it's like getting an invitation in October for the April Masters," he said. "But it's still nice on a lot of levels."

The club confirmed one tradition in a year unlike any other. For the four added to the field, invitations are in the mail.

Sport Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Passport mess

Ronaldinho: From jail for luxury hotel house arrest

Retired soccer star Ronaldinho was released from a high-security jail in Paraguay on Tuesday after more than a month, but was ordered to serve house arrest at a luxury hotel while he's investigated for using a false passport to enter the country.

The Brazilian entered the hotel about four hours after the ruling. He was transported in a police van and was allowed in after sanitary precautions due to the new coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak. Ronaldinho, the Brazilian former FIFA player of the year, and his brother Roberto de Assis were also told to pay bail of \$800,000 each. **AP**



Cricket achievement

Stokes named Wisden's leading cricketer in world

Ben Stokes has ended Virat Kohli's three-year reign as Wisden's leading cricketer in the world after playing a starring role in England's World Cup win last year.

The 2020 Wisden Cricketers' Almanack, published on Thursday, crowns the swash-buckling all-rounder as the sport's pre-eminent player.

He is the first England player to receive the honor since Andrew Flintoff in 2005.

The 28-year-old won the man-of-the-match award in the World Cup final against New Zealand at Lord's and then produced a remarkable match-winning innings of 135 not out in the third Ashes Test against Australia.

"Ben Stokes pulled off the performance of a lifetime — twice in the space of a few weeks," said Wisden editor Lawrence Booth. **AFP**

Golf

No crowds, no Ryder Cup, says European captain

Europe's Ryder Cup captain Padraig Harrington believes the biennial match with the US should be postponed if fans are ordered to stay away due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The 48-year-old Irishman told the BBC on Wednesday the febrile atmosphere created by the opposing sets of fans was part of the fabric of the event.

"Nobody wants to see the Ryder Cup played without the fans being there," said Harrington.

"There's no doubt that it makes the tournament so much better."

"I think the common consensus now is the Ryder Cup will not be played unless the fans are there." **AFP**

In addition to spending time with animals and posting TikTok videos, part-Palestinian model Bella Hadid has been cooking. *File/Getty*

CLOSE UP

Fashion stars are mastering quarantine cuisine

Arabic Manuscript: Dated

As the world continues to practice self-isolation and social distancing, our favorite models and influencers are proving to be quite the quarantine chefs.

Case in point, part-Palestinian model Bella Hadid, who has been self-isolating at her family's farm in Pennsylvania, has been trying her hand in the kitchen. When the 23-year-old isn't spending time with her animals and showcasing choreographed dance moves on TikTok, she can be found cooking.

And naturally, Hadid has been documenting her newfound kitchen skills on her Instagram Stories. So far, the model's quarantine cuisine has included marinated chicken and crispy marshmallow snacks, as well as a spicy, garlic chili and ginger chicken dish. This week, the youngest Hadid sister posted a series of captioned snaps of herself cooking up chocolate chip cookies using coconut flour, butter and "way too many



Lebanese-Australian model Jessica Kahawaty has been brushing up on her kitchen skills during self-isolation.

chocolate chips."

Her older sister Gigi has also been documenting her prowess in the kitchen on her social media. She even has a separate highlights section of Instagram Stories entitled "From My Kitchen" on her account dedicated to showcasing the delectable treats she has cooked up, which include everything from banana muffins to pesto pasta.

Homemade pasta has also found

a fun in Lebanese-Australian model Jessica Kahawaty, who jokingly captioned her most recent Instagram picture — a snap of herself enjoying a bowl of creamy pasta — “is it socially acceptable to eat pasta 5 days in a row? Asking for a friend.”

Of course, the model made sure to share a clip of her boiling the pasta on her Instagram Stories, alongside the text "Oops I did it again." But Kahawaty didn't stop there. The model also whipped up some chocolate cupcakes, according to her, "just because."

Meanwhile Saudi fashion influencer Tamara Al-Gabbani took to Instagram to share a snap of a mouth-watering dish of molokhiya.

Some of the fashion stars are serving up treats for a good cause. For her part, Moroccan-Egyptian-Dutch model Imaan Hammam took to Instagram to share the recipe of one of her favorite dishes, Egyptian lentil soup, in a bid to raise awareness about the charity campaign, "Who Are You Cooking For?" an initiative that aims to provide 100,000 medically tailored meals to families in need.

'RARE'

Selena Gomez to release extended album

Arab News Dubai

US pop star Selena Gomez announced this week she will release three new songs on an extended version of her latest album "Rare" on Thursday.

The 27-year-old singer told her 172 million Instagram followers she is adding to her latest album that was released in January. "The deluxe version of 'Rare,' featuring 'Boyfriend,' 'She' and 'Sourvenir,' is out April 9th," she wrote on Instagram.

A few hours after that, the star shared a picture of herself with music playing in the background leaving fans some hints about the beat of one of her songs. She captioned it: "There's a difference between a want and a need. Some nights I just want more than me."



Balancing Games

REVIEW

'Kim Kardashian West: The Justice Project' – who is it for?

Gautaman Bhaskaran Chennai

Kim Kardashian West's documentary about her work as a criminal-justice advocate was released this week — sparking both amusement and applause online.

"Kim Kardashian West: The Justice Project," which is streaming on Oxygen, follows Kardashian as she fights for the release of Alice Marie Johnson, a single mother who became a drug mule out of necessity and was given a sentence of life plus 25 years in the early 1990s.

The camera captures the reality star telling a group of prisoners, "I just saw something that seemed really unfair to me and I thought that I had a voice."

Justice is a part of the whole endeavor, but in the documentary *Kardashian* comes first. The film concentrates on her efforts to educate herself on the law and prisoners are used as emotional camera bait, with the star appearing every so often to make comments like "her story broke my heart" about various cases. But what if a case were not to move the star emotionally? Would it also merit her attention? Only time will tell.

The documentary highlights harrowing cases — a woman raped by her step-grandfather who eventually kills him and another who is not protected by sex trafficking laws and is tried as an adult despite being just 15.



'Kim Kardashian West: The Justice Project' premiered in April. Supplied

by Kardashian's sometimes naïve approach — “even seeing her, you could see how sweet and quiet and maybe easily influenced she could have been as a child,” she says in one scene for example.

There is also sneaking suspicion that Kardashian, however much her concern for the incarcerated men and women may be, is looking for some kind of publicity for her own achievements. A certain lack of selflessness appears to be missing here — the constant flash of cameras as Johnson declares she was granted clemency by US President Donald Trump, after Kardashian met with him in 2018, does leave a bitter taste — but on the flipside, perhaps this is exactly the kind of exposure these incarcerated men and women need?

In the end, we wonder whether the documentary - which was nicely edited at two hours-long - is for the prisoners or for Kardashian herself.

GEARING UP

Celebs tease fans with Ramadan series posters

Arab News Online

With Ramadan just around the corner, Arab celebrities have started to share posters of their shows and clips from their series online.

This week, Egyptian actor Hassan El-Raddad unveiled the poster of his show, "Shahid Ayan," to his 4.4 million Instagram followers. Within minutes, supporters and other celebrities, such as Lebanese singer Razan El-Moghrabi, congratulated him in the comments.

Similarly, the posters for Egyptian actors Amir Farara's "El-Ekhteryar" and Yasser Galal's "Al-Fetawa" sparked excitement on social media, with users asking to watch the trailers.

Actor Mohamed Ramadan spiced things up by releasing a clip from his show "El-Prince," in which he appears to be in prison and about to start a fight with one of the inmates.

"Amazing! We are excited," one user commented.

رمضان كريم

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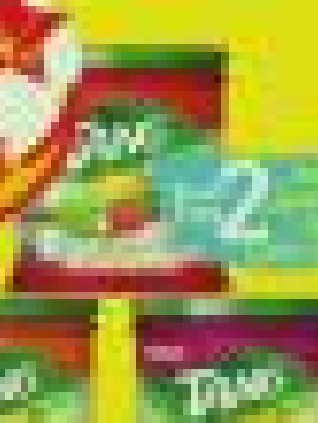


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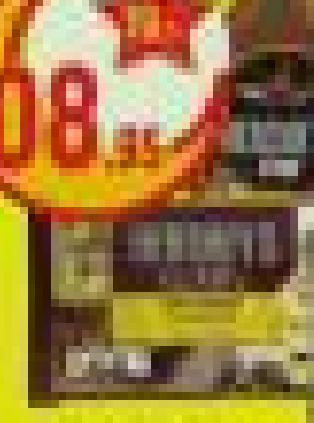
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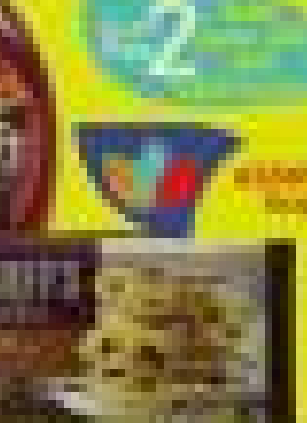
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Long Life Drink 2kg



08.50

Hemby's Syrup, Pk. 200g (500Gm) Baking
Crust Choco 275Gm



09.50

Al Raya Ghos 400Gm



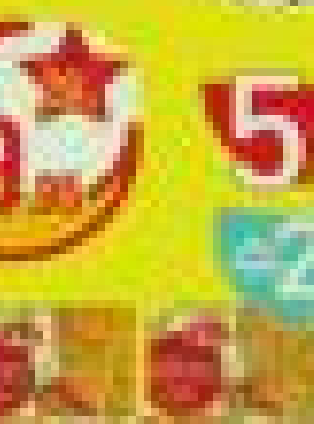
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Vinto Condair Sotte 710Gr



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Green's Caramelle W. Toppings 120Gm



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Al Raya Pies



58.50

Shaanan Rice Indian Style 300Gm



09.50

Al Raya Super Fine 5Kg



09.50

Hemby's Whole Traditional Oats 1000Gm



06.50

Al Karamah Puff Pastry Squares 1000Gm



11.50

Ala Zahra Oil Sunflower 18L+750Ml Free



08.50

Deenah Tea Biscuits 12x150Gm

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