

Amazon could be next virus hot zone: scientist
 Sao Paulo

The next pandemic could come from the Amazon rainforest, warns Brazilian ecologist David Lapola, who says human encroachment on animals' habitats -- a likely culprit in the coronavirus outbreak -- is soaring there because of rampant deforestation.

Researchers say the urbanization of once-wild areas contributes to the emergence of zoonotic diseases -- those that pass from animals to humans.

That includes the new coronavirus, which scientists believe originated in bats before passing to humans in China's rapidly urbanizing Hubei province, probably via a third species.

Lapola, 38, who studies how human activity will reshape the future ecosystems of tropical forests, says the same processes are in play in the Amazon.

"The Amazon is a huge reservoir of viruses," he told AFP in an interview.

"We'd better not try our luck."

The world's biggest rainforest is disappearing at an alarming rate.

ICT gets a royal fillip

Brazil, Spain win UNESCO King Hamad bin Isa prize for ICT

TDT, agencies | Manama

The UNESCO King Hamad bin Isa Prize for the Use of ICT in Education has crowned The Letrus Writing Skills Programme from Brazil and the Dytective dyslexia screening tool from Spain as this year's winners.

Each of the winners will receive an award of \$25,000 in a ceremony whose date will be announced in the coming weeks.

This year's award focuses on the use of artificial intelligence for innovation in teaching and learning, in line with the UNESCO's drive to promote effective and ethical applications of artificial intelligence in education and make it universally available.

The 2020 laureates were selected out of 113 nominations submitted by the Governments of UNESCO's Member States and UNESCO partner organisations on the recommendation of an International Jury of educational experts.


The Letrus Writing Skills



Programme, developed by the Letrus company of Brazil, is an AI-powered programme for automated feedback on students' writing. Letrus aims to reduce functional illiteracy in the Por-

tuguese language by improving practice opportunities for secondary school students and teachers.

Over 65,000 students from the twenty-six states in Brazil have



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Spanish in approximately 15 minutes.

The tool, which combines online entertainment experiences linked to predictive machine learning applications, has so far benefited 270,000 children from 43 countries, who underwent free introductory diagnosis of dyslexia. The company has also provided grants to poor families with children who need orthodontic education for dyslexia.

Education Minister Dr Majid bin Ali Al-Nuaimi stressed the importance of the prize, which was launched by His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa and adopted by the UNESCO.

He paid tribute to HM the King, hailing the royal initiative to launch the award, which reaches this year its eleventh session, establishing itself as a prestigious global award.

Established in 2005 and supported by Bahrain, the Prize annually rewards individuals and organisations that use digital technologies to enhance teaching, learning and overall education performance.

HRH Sabeeka directs to pay debts of Bahraini women

TDT Manama

The Supreme Council for Women (SCW) announced it will clear the dues and debts of Bahraini women, whose names are listed in 'Fael Khair' service, to help them tide over the turmoils of Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

'Fael Khair' which translates to "Person of Good Will" was launched recently by the Verdicts Implementation Directorate to help Bahraini women who were sentenced over financial cases as the Kingdom battles to contain the spread of Coronavirus Pandemic.

The latest move also forms part of a national campaign themed "Together for the Safety of Bahrain" launched by SCW last month.

The campaign follows the directive of HRH Princess Sabeeka bint Ibrahim Al Khalifa, Wife of His Majesty the King and

President of SCW and the humanitarian stances and generous initiatives of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa.

SCW in cooperation with the National Taskforce for Combating Coronavirus (COVID-19) will coordinate the payment. The task force is spearheaded by His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince, Deputy Supreme Commander and First Deputy Premier.

The SCW Secretary-General Hala Al Ansari praised the directives as reflecting the humanitarian face of HRH Princess Sabeeka.

"HRH Princess Sabeeka's directives reflect the ongoing efforts of SCW to ensure utmost stability for Bahraini families as well as health and psychological safety for their members."

She also pointed out that the "Together for the Safety of Bahrain" campaign is



HRH Princess Sabeeka

meant for providing prompt and urgent support to Bahraini women to help them overcome the pandemic.

She noted that the campaign, in coordination with the Interior Ministry and competent authorities, will finalise the payment procedures as soon as possible.

Hala Al Ansari said that SCW will spare no effort in providing the needed assistance to Bahraini women.

New 253 active cases

Global toll passes 300,000

TDT | Manama

Bahrain yesterday recorded 253 new active Coronavirus (COVID-19) cases bringing the total active cases in the Kingdom to 3839.

The Ministry of Health, in a statement on its Twitter handle, said that 215 of the new cases are expatriate workers, while 29 are contacts of active cases. Nine are travel related.

The ministry, in the past 24 hours, conducted 8160 new COVID-19 tests, as it continues to increase its testing capacity. The total number of tests conducted till date is 211,127, according to MoH website.

Besides, the authority said, 15 people recovered from the infection yesterday, increasing the total recoveries in Bahrain to 2220.

As of yesterday, the total number of virus cases in the Kingdom is 6069 and a total of 10 people succumbed fighting the virus. Of the 3839 active cases, 3833 are in stable conditions, while 6 people are in critical conditions.

Meanwhile, globally, the virus has claimed over 300,000 people and infected more than 4.4 million, as countries ease curbs.

Covid-19 Cases:

4,507,274

Deaths

302,298

Recovered:

1,697,459

The World Health Organisation has warned that the coronavirus may never go away and populations will have to learn to live with it just as they have HIV.

"This virus may become just another endemic virus in our communities and this virus may never go away," said Michael Ryan, the global health body's emergencies director in Geneva.

"HIV has not gone away -- but we have come to terms with the virus."

The prospect of the disease hanging around leaves governments across the world facing a delicate balancing act between suppressing the pathogen and getting economies up and running.

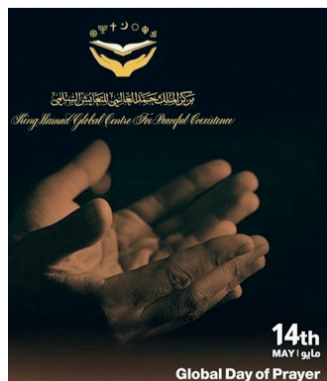
For humanity

Religious leaders laud HM King's support

TDT | Manama

Religious leaders who participated in the 'May 14 World Day of Prayer for Humanity' have praised Bahrain's effective participation in the initiative launched by the Higher Committee of Human Fraternity for the good of all humanity to end the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

They praised His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa's



welcoming of the global event, noting that HM the King is the first supporter of the values of religious tolerance and peaceful co-existence at the regional and local levels. The participants, who belong to many religions, lauded HM the King's vision and consolidation of the peaceful co-existence spirit in the world, through the launch of "The Kingdom of Bahrain Declaration."

(Continued on page 2)



03 Stop throwing used masks

04 Masks new norm for air travel

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HH Shaikh Nasser hails efforts of “Feena Khair” committee

TDT | Manama

His Highness Shaikh Nasser bin Hamad Al Khalifa yesterday praised the efforts of the coordination committee of “Feena Khair” campaign in charge of distributing the aid.

The Representative of His Majesty the King for Humanitarian Work and Youth Affairs, National Security Advisor and Board of Trustees Chairman of the Royal Humanitarian Foundation (RHF) directed the committee to ensure that it reaches the needy.

This came during the committee's second meeting held under the chairmanship of RHF Secre-

tary-General Dr Mustafa Al Sayed, the committee chairman.

He said the meeting shed light on visions and proposals which include assisting needy and productive families, contributing to sterilisation and disinfection of villages and cities, providing computers for school students, supporting the needy and helping people with special needs.

The committee also underscored the importance of boosting social awareness of coronavirus pandemic by distributing multi-language stickers, particularly among expatriate workers who have a high rate of infection among them.



BDF Commander-in-Chief Field Marshal Shaikh Khalifa bin Ahmed Al Khalifa during an inspection visit to one of the units, yesterday. The commander-in-chief reviewed the unit's administrative and combat readiness, as well as its military preparations and work progress. Shaikh Khalifa expressed his deep appreciation and pride in the competency and professionalism of the BDF members in carrying out their duties.

Bahrain ambassador to Tokyo assures students full assistance

TDT | Tokyo

Bahrain's Ambassador to Japan, Ahmed Mohammed Al-Dosari, affirmed the embassy's readiness to help Bahraini students in Japanese universities.

This came as the ambassador gave on Wednesday evening, a virtual lecture for a group of Bahraini students studying abroad.

The event was organised by the

Bahrain Institute for Political Development (BIPD) in cooperation with the Mohammed bin Mubarak Al Khalifa Academy for Diplomatic Studies under the title “Ambassadors of the Nation” as part of a series of lectures via the Internet.

The ambassador advised those wishing to return home to register through Wejhaty or contact the Kingdom's embassies abroad.

For peaceful co-existence

● **Grand Mufti of the Republic of Chechnya, Shaikh Salakh Mezhev, praised HM the King's kind invitation**

● **Archbishop Niphon prayed to God the Almighty to remove the deadly pandemic**

● **Chairman of the Baha'i Social Society, said the health crisis has revived human communities' collective effort**

● **The representative of Buddhism in Thailand prayed for the good of humanity amid the current circumstances**

● **The representative of the Hindu community expressed hope that humanity will overcome the pandemic soon**

(Continues from page 1)

They also valued highly the efforts exerted by the King Hamad Global Centre for Peaceful Coexistence to directly interact with all global initiatives aimed at strengthening the unity and solidarity of the entire humanity.

Board of Trustees Chairman of the King Hamad Global Centre for Peaceful Coexistence, Dr Shaikh Khalid bin Khalifa Al Khalifa, said that the centre's participation in the 14th May Global Day of Prayer translates HM the King's directives and visions on adopting and responding to all international calls aimed at enhancing solidarity among all human beings.

Grand Mufti of the Republic of Chechnya, Shaikh Salakh



Indeed, this day gathers believers from all over the world of different religions and different origins, bringing a message of hope and solidarity in this difficult stage in which the world must strengthen human rapprochement to face the pandemic. The COVID-19 crisis knows no border and affects all countries. It reminds us that we must remain united and that the international challenges of the 21st century can only be addressed globally and multilaterally. This coexistence reflects the sense of diversity and openness that will help to overcome all challenges and promote prosperity in the Kingdom of Bahrain

JÉRÔME CAUCHARD, FRENCH AMBASSADOR TO BAHRAIN



Bahrain is once again demonstrating the importance it places on the consolidation of religious freedoms, regardless of ethnicity or religious background. Today will be a moment of reflection, hope, unity and collective responsibility to help the world recover from this pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has reminded us all that working together can promote a positive change, helping us overcome difficulties we may face and make the world a better place

RODERICK DRUMMOND, UK AMBASSADOR TO BAHRAIN

Mezhev, praised HM the King's kind invitation in the event devoted to prayer for the good of humanity.

The representative of the Antiochian Church in Moscow, Archbishop Niphon Seikaly, expressed honour in participating in the event at the invitation of HM King Hamad.

Archbishop Niphon prayed to God the Almighty to remove the deadly pandemic, grant the patients quick recovery and rest the souls of those who died in eternal peace.

The executive director of the All Dulles Area Muslim Society (ADAMS), Imam Muhammad Magid, and the representative of the Shiite community in Lebanon, Sayyid Ali Al-Amin, supplicated Allah the Almighty to protect humanity from the coronavirus.

Patriarch Mar Ignatius Avram II, in his prayer, wished coronavirus patients speedy recovery, praying to God the Almighty to protect humanity from epidemics, evil and poverty.

Chairman of the Baha'i Social Society, Badie Al-Baha'I,

said that the health crisis that has affected humanity in various fields in an unprecedented way has revived human communities' collective efforts, expressing confidence in the ability to overcome the pandemic thanks to the ongoing solidarity and cohesion among all.

The representative of the Hindu community, Yadunathji Maharaj, said that the whole world is suffering from the spread of the virus, expressing hope that humanity will overcome the pandemic soon.

Reverend Johnnie Moore indicated that Bahrain's participation in the global call for prayer for humanity is in line with its leading example of tolerance with other religions, based on a long history of communication, acceptance of the other and adoption of peace.

In a related context, Professor of History of Religions at the King Hamad Chair in Interfaith Dialogue and Peaceful Co-Existence at the Sapienza University, Italy, Alessandro Saggiaro, highlighted the importance of prayer in reducing

human problems and sufferings, noting that the current crisis resulting from COVID-19 requires everyone to pray for the good of humanity.

The representative of Buddhism in Thailand prayed for the good of humanity amid the current circumstances, wishing people from all religions and sects every success in overcoming the pandemic.

Jewish Rabbi, David Rosen, from the United Kingdom, said: “We are very grateful for the honour given to us to participate in holding Jewish prayers on behalf of the Kingdom of Bahrain and the world in the face of the Coronavirus pandemic. We pray to God to treat our patients and protect all human lives and pure souls from this virus. Through our joint prayers around the world, we will learn to spread love and peace among all our people Humans”.

Rabbi David Rosen prayed to God to preserve Bahrain-King, government and people, wishing the kingdom and its tolerant society everlasting security, peace, stability and prosperity.

Smuggling of maids: Police arrests two

TDT | Manama

The Directorate of Anti-human Trafficking and the Protection of Public Morals at the Ministry of Interior yesterday arrested two Asian nationals for smuggling maids into the Kingdom.

Police arrested the men a 33 and 42-year-old Asian nationals following an investigation into a video clip that went viral on social media.

In a statement, Interior ministry confirmed the incident and said: “33 and 42-year-old Asians, who were involved in smuggling of nine maids of African nationality, were arrested.” Necessary legal measures are taken, the statement said.

Salons warned against home services

TDT | Manama

The Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism has warned hairdressing salons in the Kingdom not to operate under any circumstance or to provide any of the services either at their shops or customers' homes.

The ministry also ordered to remove all old advertisements offering home services, which is currently banned by law.

Announcing the decision, the ministry said these advertisements are creating confusion among the general public, hence should be removed immediately.

The ministry earlier ordered to close all Women and Men salons in the Kingdom as a precautionary measure to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

Strict actions will be taken against all those flouting the



Picture courtesy of Al Ayam

laws and regulations, said The Control and Resources, Abdulla Assistant Undersecretary of laziz Al-Ashraf.

Derasat issues reports on coronavirus crisis

TDT | Manama

Proximity to Iran acted as a major factor in the ‘quick and surprising’ spread of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in the Gulf region, according to a new report by Derasat.

The report by Dr Ashraf Mohammed Keshk also pins the blame on the high number of expatriate workers for the outbreak, which he finds as “surprising and rapid”.

The observations in the “Gulf countries’ management of coronavirus crisis” report is authored by The Director of Strategic and International Studies Programme at the Bahrain Centre for Strategic, International and Energy Studies.

Another report, also by Dr



Keshk, on international relations linked to the virus, focuses on a change in the international relations linked to the virus.

The report describes how the global system since the end of the Second World War has been based on the policies of victorious countries and incidents like that on September 11, 2001 influenced major power's policies.

Stop throwing used masks and gloves on the ground

Southern Municipality issues advisories, places small wayside containers

TDT | Manama

The Southern District Municipality has issued advisories against throwing masks and gloves on the street and public places.

The unlawful littering, the Southern District Municipality officials said, is endangering public health and causing concerns for people, an *Al Ayam* report said.

To end this practice, the authority said they are now placing small containers to help public dispose of their used masks and gloves securely.

Do not 'throw them out in open places' to protect public health, the officials urged.

"Lot of people are throwing down their masks and gloves irresponsibly at public places," officials at the authority said. "This has led us to come up with the idea of placing small containers."

The bin, officials said, are placed at multiple points at commercial streets and popular public destinations such as markets and supermarkets, in a way that allows locating it easily.

The authority this year has launched an awareness campaign under the slogan (Ramadan Giving) to encourage the public to adopt the correct practices to maintain the safety and health of the



Small bins are placed to throw away used masks and gloves (Picture courtesy of Al Ayam)

community.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has earlier warned, "If medical masks are worn, appropriate use and disposal is es-

sential to ensure they are effective and to avoid any increase in the risk of transmission associated with the incorrect use and disposal of masks."

Top Bahraini official urges international cooperation in fighting virus outbreak

Foreign Affairs Assistant Minister takes part in Human Rights Working Group virtual meeting

TDT | Manama

Bahrain yesterday urged international cooperation in respecting human rights while implementing measures to combat the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

The world nations have a crucial role to play "in facing these challenges and respecting rights," Abdulla bin Faisal bin Jabur Al Doseri, the Foreign Affairs Assistant Minister, said.

He was speaking during the fifth meeting of the Human Rights Working Group held virtually with the European Union's External Action Service (EEAS).

Bahrain, the Assistant Minister said, is battling the outbreak by implementing a balanced approach that gives "utmost priority to the rights of the individuals and safety of the society."

The Kingdom is taking care "not to impose any unnecessary and disproportionate restrictions" and is "motivating citizens and residents to stay at their homes".

Bahraini Ambassador to Belgium, Dr Bahia Jawad Al Jishi, was present during the meeting chaired by Gabriel Vinales, Director General of the Middle East and North Africa at the Foreign Employment Authority. Also present was Head of the European Union (EU) Delegate accredited to Bahrain, residing in Riyadh, Ambassador Michele Cervone



Abdulla bin Faisal bin Jabur Al Doseri

D'urso.

Further explaining Bahrain's approach, the assistant minister said: "Besides providing free medical care and services to all citizens and residents, Bahrain also suspended the fees for foreign patients at government health centres."

Al Doseri said, His Majesty the King, on March 12, also granted amnesty to 901 prisoners on humanitarian grounds.

Al Doseri also highlighted the success attained by the National Taskforce for Combating Coronavirus led by His Royal Highness the Crown Prince, Deputy Supreme Commander and First Deputy Prime Minister, Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa.

Al Mana reviewed the efforts made by the Health Ministry in raising the absorptive capacity of isolation and treatment centres to 4,257 beds.

The European side praised the level of cooperation and coordination between the Kingdom and the EU.

Trio in the dock for human trafficking

TDT | Manama

The Public Prosecution has completed investigations in a case involving three Asian nationals who're accused of human trafficking.

The suspects, two males and a female, will stand trial before the High Criminal Court on 31 May 2020.

This was confirmed by Capital Governorate Prosecution Chief Prosecutor Mohammed Salah, who explained that the defendants lured the victim, a fellow Asian national, and forced her to work into prostitution.

According to the defendants' confession and victim's testimony, the victim was working as a domestic worker in Bahrain when she was contacted by the female suspect through a popular social media platform. The suspect convinced



Representative picture (Courtesy of lone star legal aid)

the victim to move out of her employer's house with promises of a better job and better pay.

After leaving her current employer, the trio then brought her to an apartment in Hoora area in the Capital Governorate.

However, upon reaching the place, the trio locked her up and took her mobile phone denying any contact with the outside world.

She was forced to practice prostitution in return for amounts that the de-

endants collected.

The incident came to light, only when the victim managed to obtain a phone from another lady, who was with her and informed the police.

Police following a raid freed the victims and arrested the suspects.

The defendants were referred to the Public Prosecution.

During interrogation, the trio confessed to their crimes. The prosecution ordered to keep them in custody until the next court session.

Eight private hospitals allowed to conduct COVID-19 tests: Al Ayam reports

TDT | Manama

Eight private hospitals in the Kingdom have so far granted permits to conduct tests for Coronavirus, according to an *Al Ayam* report.

Those who are not infected or suspected to have an infection and who do not have any symptom but wish to conduct a test are eligible to take the test.

"Al Salam Hospital, American Hospital, Royal Hospital, Awali Hospital, Specialist Hospital, Canadian Hospital, Ibn Al Nafees Hospital and Dr Tariq Saeed Hospital" received the permits, the report said citing unnamed sources.

The report further said that curative health services, including continuous examination, quarantine and treatment, are free of charge in all precautionary quarantine centres, isolation and treatment centres for citizens and residents in the Kingdom.

While the tests are provided free of charge at government facilities, Al Ayam quoting sources said it might range between 40 and 50 fifty dinars in a private hospital.

Peddling drugs: Hairdresser gets 10 years in jail

TDT | Manama

The Fourth High Criminal Court awarded a hairdresser, an Asian national, 10 years in jail and a fine of BD5,000 for selling drugs.

The man, who was also black-listed from reentering Bahrain, was caught red-handed while selling hashish oil in the Capital Governorate, last February.

A tip-off received at the In-



Representative picture (Courtesy of walesonline)

terior Ministry Anti-narcotic department led to the investigation and arrest.

The police then verified the information received and laid a trap for the accused.

On 9 February 2020, the department recruited a secret informer to contact the suspect and made a deal to buy BD50 of hashish oil from him at an open yard in the Seef District.

Based on the inputs, a team of

undercover cops then reached the spot and waited for the suspect to arrive. As the suspect reached the spot and handed over the substance, cops in plainclothes apprehend him.

The suspect was taken into custody and referred to the Public Prosecution after completing the investigation.

The prosecution charged him with conducting illegal trade in drugs.

Just for money!

Bahraini man marries Arab woman to pocket Govt financial support; Shaira Court approves divorce

TDT | Manama

Bahrain's Sharia Court has dissolved the marriage of couple accepting the wife's plea that the marriage was just a coverup for her husband to pocket the government's financial assistance.

The wife, an Arab woman in her early twenties at the time of marriage, told the court that the man, a Bahraini citizen abandoned her once he received all documents required to applied for the government's aid.

The woman was brought to Bahrain by her husband after the marriage.

She, however, told the Sharia Court that he left her at her family home after a year-and-a-half when he managed to get the documents.

The woman's lawyer Khulood Mathloom told the court, "As soon he received the formal paperwork of the marriage he dumped her at her uncle's house."

"He didn't even bother to visit her at least once, even though she tried calling him many times, causing her deep mental trauma, as she was also

As soon he received the formal paperwork of the marriage he dumped her at her uncle's house

LAWYER KHULOOD MATHLOOM



Representative picture

new to the place.

"He continued ignoring her calls and messages and failed to support her in times of distress," Khulood Mathloom told the court.

"He caused to her huge mental damage with his acts," she added.

Accepting the arguments, the court allowed the couple to part their ways.

Malaysia to recover \$107.3 million after settling 1MDB case against film producer

Reuters | Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia's anti-corruption commission said yesterday it will recover overseas assets worth about \$107.3 million in a settlement deal reached with Riza Aziz, a producer of Hollywood film "The Wolf of Wall Street" and the stepson of former Prime Minister Najib Razak.

Prosecutors had earlier announced that it was dropping five charges of money laundering against Riza, who was accused of receiving \$248 million misappropriated from scandal-linked state fund 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB).

Trump is open to more coronavirus stimulus



Reuters | Washington

US President Donald Trump is open to negotiations on another possible stimulus bill amid the novel coronavirus pandemic, but not the one put forward by House of Representatives Democrats, a White House spokeswoman said yesterday.

Kayleigh McEnany told reporters at the White House that the Republican president "was taking his time" to weigh what - if any - more federal action was needed. "He's open to it," she added, saying he would like to see a payroll tax cut but that it was not a requirement.

Temperature checks, masks the new normal for air travel, says Dubai airport CEO

Reuters | Dubai

Temperature screening and face masks will become common sights at airports to mitigate the spread of the new coronavirus but physical distancing could make flying more expensive, the head of Dubai airport said.

Around the world, governments, airports and airlines are considering temporary safety measures to restart air travel, including mandatory temperature checks, wearing face masks and keeping passengers apart.

"We are going to have to take whatever measures are necessary to protect the travelling public and our staff," Chief Executive Paul Griffiths told Reuters.

Dubai International, one of the world's busiest airports, sus-



A security man takes temperature of a woman amid the outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) at Dubai International Airport, UAE

pending passenger services in late March as the United Arab Emirates took drastic measures to contain the virus.

The UAE has since allowed

some repatriation flights and eased other restrictions in the Gulf state, though it is not clear when normal flights will restart.

Temporary safety measures

should be expected as flights resume but Griffiths cautioned physical distancing rules would eventually limit growth as demand rebounds.

"We will not be able to operate at anything close to our original design capacity if we had to maintain social distancing," he said.

Dubai airport, the hub of airline Emirates, was handling Airbus A380s with over 600 passengers before the virus forced the airport to halt flights.

Physical distancing could also increase airfares if airlines were restricted to selling fewer tickets in order to keep some seats empty, Griffiths said.

Fit to travel

But until there was a vaccine, treatment or reliable, quick method to detect the virus, measures that reduce the risk

of contagion would need to be enforced, Griffiths said.

It is unclear when global travel will recover from the pandemic which has shattered demand and will partially depend on countries lifting their lockdowns.

Regaining public confidence in the safety of air travel is seen by the aviation industry as a significant challenge.

Countries that have the spread of the virus under control and agree to reopen their borders to each other are likely to drive air travel demand over the near term, Griffiths said, but it is impossible to say when travel could return to pre-pandemic levels.

Passenger traffic at Dubai airport fell by a fifth in the first quarter to 17.8 million as countries closed their borders due to the coronavirus outbreak.

India to provide free food grains to ms of migrant workers

Reuters | New Delhi

India will provide free food grains to millions of migrant workers hardest hit by a weeks-long lockdown as well as offer employment under a rural jobs program, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said yesterday.

The government will spend 35 billion rupees (\$463.06 million) on food for nearly 80 m migrant workers over the next two months, Sitharaman told a news conference.

The allocation is part of a 20 trillion rupee (\$266 bn) fiscal and monetary package to prop up the ailing economy.

"The government is concerned about migrant workers," Sitharaman said, and had provided funds to states to provide shelter, food grain and transport for migrants.

Since April, the government has spent 100 bn rupees to offer work to near 23 m unemployed people in rural areas under the ongoing rural job guarantee program, she said.

The government also plans to extend a bank loan interest subsidy programme for

affordable housing to rented housing for migrant workers, she said.

On Wednesday, it announced new credit lines by offering bank guarantees on loans of over \$60 bn to small businesses, shadow banks and power companies.

In an address to the nation on Monday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the package was equivalent to 10 per cent of India's gross domestic product, and was meant to support workers and businesses reeling from the impact of the prolonged shutdown.

Economists said new measures would have a limited impact on the government's fiscal spending as large parts of funding for migrant workers, farmers and small businesses was through state-run banks and financial institutions.

Sitharaman said street vendors and farmers would get new subsidised bank loans, and that nearly 30 m farmers had so far benefited from a three-month moratorium on bank loans amounting to 4.22 trillion rupees.

Stocks sink on second virus wave fear, US jobs

AFP | London

World equities sank yesterday as mounting US unemployment added to worries about a slow economic recovery from coronavirus shutdowns and a second wave of the deadly disease.

Sentiment was already moribund when data was released showing new US claims for unemployment benefit slowed to 2.98 million last week.

Markets had slumped Wednesday after Federal Reserve chief Jerome Powell warned of "lasting damage" to the economy from coronavirus shutdowns.

In Asian trading yesterday, Tokyo ended down 1.7 per cent, Hong Kong shed 1.5 pc and Shanghai lost 1.0 pc, as a sustained rally for global equities ran out of steam.

The negativity spilled over into Europe, where leading indices briefly slumped more than 3.0 pc before pulling back heading into the close.

Sentiment was hit also after the World Health Organization warned the virus "may never go away" and the European Union's medicines agency suggested a vaccine could be ready

Key figures around 1530 GMT

London - FTSE 100:	▼ 2.8 pc at 5,741.54 points (close)
Frankfurt - DAX 30:	▼ 2.0 pc at 10,337.54 (close)
Paris - CAC 40:	▼ 1.9 pc at 4,273.13 (close)
Milan - FTSE MIB:	▼ 1.8 pc at 16,867.76 (close)
Madrid - IBEX 35:	▼ 1.3 pc at 6,545.60 (close)
EURO STOXX 50:	▼ 2.0 pc at 2,754.39
New York - Dow:	▼ 0.4 pc at 23,163.86
Tokyo - Nikkei 225:	▼ 1.7 pc at 19,914.78 (close)
Hong Kong - Hang Seng:	▼ 1.5 pc at 23,829.74 (close)
Brent North Sea crude:	▲ 3.4 pc at \$30.18 per barrel
West Texas Intermediate:	▲ 3.5 pc at \$26.17
Euro/dollar:	▼ at \$1.0802 from \$1.0818 at 2100 GMT
Dollar/yen:	▲ at 107.12 from 107.03 yen
Pound/dollar:	▼ at \$1.2196 from \$1.2232
Euro/pound:	▲ at 88.56 pence from 88.44 pence

only in a year.

Wall Street slipped in late morning deals Thursday, with the Dow down 0.4 pc.

Signs of an easing in the outbreak globally had led to hopes for a slow return to normality but fresh infections in South Korea, China, Germany and other countries as they eased lockdowns have thrown a spanner in the works.

They came as US President Donald Trump's top virus ex-

pert Anthony Fauci warned against re-opening too quickly, saying it could cause a second wave of infections and hurt any economic recovery.

Meanwhile, oil prices surged as the International Energy Agency said the easing of lockdowns and output cuts had helped the oil market after "Black April", when US prices collapsed into negative territory on evaporating demand and a vast supply glut.

Porsches, popcorn, social distancing at Dubai drive-in cinema

Reuters | Dubai

Movie-goers in Dubai frustrated by the closure of cinemas during the coronavirus pandemic will soon be able to watch films from the comfort of their own car at a new drive-in cinema created on the roof of one of the world's largest shopping malls.

With social distancing mandatory in the United Arab Emirates to help curb the spread of the virus, VOX Cinemas says viewers will be limited to two per car at the open-air venue, which opens on Sunday and can accommodate up to 75 cars at a time.

Tickets cost 180 dirhams (\$50) per vehicle inclusive of popcorn, snacks and drinks.

"We keep our social distancing so it's a brilliant idea in my opinion," Porsche driv-



People sit in their cars watching a movie in a drive-in cinema at the Mall of the Emirates, following the outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), in Dubai, United Arab Emirates

er Xavier Libbrecht told Reuters during a pre-opening event at the drive-in cinema on Wednesday.

Dubai, the UAE's business and tourism hub, has been easing coronavirus closures and restrictions since the Muslim holy month of Ramadan began three weeks ago, allowing malls and dine-in restaurants to reopen at limited capacity.

However, children aged 3-12 and people over 60 are still barred from such venues, including the outdoor cinema, which sits on the roof of Majid Al Futtaim's Mall of the Emirates. The screen stands under the peak of the mall's indoor ski slope.

"Any excuse to get out the house during coronavirus times," said Patrick, another member

of a Porsche car club invited to Wednesday's event, at which an action comedy film was shown.

"In the comfort of your own car you don't have to worry about chewing too loud," he added.

Cinema-goers caught a cool evening breeze, but were still switching car engines on and off for the air conditioning. Temperatures can rise above 40 degrees in Dubai during the long summer months and the humidity is oppressive.

Dubai, a major shopping and entertainment destination, has been hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic due to travel disruptions and closures to contain the spread of the disease.

The UAE has so far recorded 20,386 coronavirus infections and 206 deaths.

Uber offers \$6 bn for meal delivery rival Grubhub: source

New York

Uber is offering \$6 billion in stock in its takeover bid for meal delivery group Grubhub, a source familiar with the talks said Wednesday.

The two firms were not in agreement on a deal that would unite two of the three largest US players in the food delivery segment, according to the source who declined to be identified.

The \$6 billion share offer was first reported by The Wall Street Journal.

Neither company commented on the potential tie-up but Grubhub said in a statement it is "squarely focused on delivering shareholder value"



and added that "like any responsible company, we are always looking at value-enhancing opportunities."

Uber has been seeing strong growth in its food delivery operation Uber Eats, partly offsetting the sharp decline in ride-hailing during the global pandemic.

According to the research firm Second Measure, Uber Eats accounted for 20 per cent of US meal delivery sales in March and Grubhub had 28pc. A combined operation would overtake number one player DoorDash, which had 42 pc.

WTO chief steps down before term expires

Agencies | Geneva/Brussels

The World Trade Organization (WTO) chief said yesterday he will step down on August 31, a year

before his term ends, insisting an early change of leadership would help the body face "new post-COVID realities."

"This is a decision that I do not take lightly," Roberto Azevedo told member state representatives, according to a written version of his speech.

"It is a personal decision, a family decision," he stressed, adding, "It is not health-related... nor am I pursuing any political opportunities."

Brazilian Roberto Azevedo, 62, has been director-general since 2013 and is serving a second term due to conclude at the end of August next year.

Azevedo's early departure would come at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic has pushed the global economy and international trade into turmoil, suffering downturns not seen since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Global trade, already hit

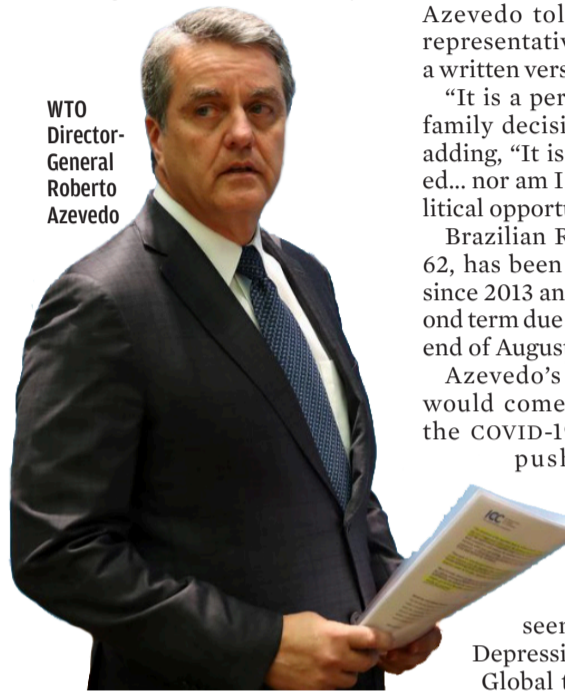
by trade tensions and uncertainties around Brexit, is expected to register "double-digit declines in trade volumes" in nearly all regions this year, the WTO said last month.

The 164-member organization was meanwhile already in crisis before the pandemic hit, amid raging trade wars and as the United States under President Donald Trump has pushed for dramatic reforms of the Geneva-based body.

The WTO was, for instance, forced to put its dispute settlement appeal system on ice last December after Washington blocked the appointment of new judges, preventing it from reaching a three-judge quorum.

Simon Evenett, professor of international trade and economic development at Switzerland's University of St. Gallen, said the next director-general would need to put the WTO back together again, with the principle trade battles now in national capitals, not Geneva.

WTO Director-General Roberto Azevedo



Boeing scores deals to deliver more than 1,000 missiles to Saudi

Washington

Boeing has been awarded two contracts worth more than \$2 billion for the delivery of more than 1,000 air-to-surface and anti-ship missiles to Saudi Arabia, the Pentagon said Wednesday.

A first contract, worth \$1.97 billion, is for the modernization of SLAM ER cruise missiles as well as delivery of 650 new missiles "in support of the government of Saudi Arabia," it said.

The contract is to be completed by December 2028 for the SLAM ERs, a GPS-guided air-to-surface missile with a range of up to 155 nautical miles (approximately 180 miles, 290 kilometers).

The Pentagon also announced a more than \$650 million contract for delivery of 467 new Harpoon Block II anti-ship missiles, including more than 400 to Saudi Arabia.

The others will be delivered to Brazil, Qatar and Thailand. Support equipment will be supplied to India, Japan, the Netherlands and South Korea, the statement said.



Harpoon Block II features an autonomous, all-weather, over-the-horizon strike capability and is an ideal weapon for both anti-ship and land-strike missions. (Naval News)



Standoff Land Attack Missile Expanded Response (SLAM ER)

In a separate statement, Boeing said the new contracts would ensure the continuation of the Harpoon programme through 2026 and restart the SLAM ER production line.

Boeing, which said it delivered its last SLAM ER weapon system in 2008, put the total of the contracts at \$3.1 billion. A spokeswoman said that included a previously announced order.

New Zealand boosts budget spending amid virus downturn

Wellington

New Zealand announced a NZ\$50 billion (US\$30 billion) war chest Thursday to help cushion the impact of the coronavirus pandemic that has stalled the economy and already cost thousands of jobs.

The COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund is the centrepiece of Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's annual budget, aiming to stimulate recovery with spending on infrastructure and business support.

The South Pacific nation has contained the virus by closing its borders and imposing a seven-week lockdown that ended Thursday, but Ardern said there were still tough times ahead.

"Global predictions are dire. Unemployment will rise, and growth will slow dramatically," she said.

"We know as a trading nation that will have an impact, and it will be significant and it will be painful."



Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern warned of pain ahead, with unemployment rising and the economy contracting

About NZ\$30 billion from the fund has already been allocated, with NZ\$20 billion kept in reserve for projects over the next four years.

Even with the stimulus, the Treasury predicts unemployment will reach at least 8.3 per cent next year and the economy will contract 4.6 per cent.

But the recession, which Ardern said would be "sudden and deep" is expected to ease by 2022, when growth is forecast to bounce back to 8.6 per cent.

The massive spending means government debt will peak at 53.6 per cent of GDP in 2023, more than double the Ardern administration's pre-virus ceiling of 25 per cent.

ing of 25 percent.

Ardern, who faces an election in September, said she wanted to use the money to fix long-term problems, as well as boost the economy.

"We have long faced a housing crisis, our environment has been suffering, inequality and child poverty have all been issues we've had to tackle," the centre-left leader said, raising issues that she campaigned on before winning the 2017 election.

"In three years' time, I want to look back and say that COVID was not the point those issues got worse, but the chance we had to make them better."

Ardern has been widely praised at home and abroad for her decisive action during the pandemic, building on the acclaim she received after last year's Christchurch mosque shooting, in which 51 people died.

Nearly 600,000 Australians lose jobs as virus lockdown bites

● Australia has been one of the most successful countries in containing COVID-19

● Just 12.4 million Australians now have jobs

● 2.7 million people -- or one in five Australian workers -- either left the workforce or had their work hours reduced

Sydney

Almost 600,000 Australians lost their jobs as the virus shutdown took hold in April, the



Prime Minister Scott Morrison has warned of further pain to come for Australia's economy

steepest monthly drop since records began more than 40 years ago, data showed yesterday.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) said 100,000 people

filed for unemployment benefits, while a further 500,000 left the workforce altogether.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison called the figures "terribly

shocking", with the ABS reporting the underutilisation rate -- which combines unemployment and underemployment -- reached a record high of 19.9 per cent in April.

The ABS said 2.7 million people -- or one in five Australian workers -- either left the workforce or had their work hours reduced as the country recorded an "unprecedented fall" in the workforce participation rate to 63.5 pc. The drop in the participation rate meant unemployment rose one percentage point to 6.1 pc, well short of forecasts of more than eight per cent.

Just 12.4 million Australians now have jobs after the steepest monthly fall in employment since the ABS began recording monthly data in 1978.

Morrison warned Australians to brace for more difficult

Prime Minister Scott Morrison warned Australians to brace for more difficult economic news in the months ahead



economic news in the months ahead, adding: "A very tough day. Terribly shocking, although not unanticipated."

"We knew there would be hard news as the pandemic wreaks an impact on Australia as it is on countries all around the world."

The Treasury has forecast the unemployment rate will reach

10 per cent in the June quarter. Morrison said the number of people now covered by Jobkeeper, a Aus\$1,500-a- fortnight wage subsidy programme paid to staff via their employers, now exceeds six million.

Australia has been one of the most successful countries in containing COVID-19, with fewer than 7,000 confirmed cases and 100 deaths out of a population of 25 million.

But restrictions on travel, public gatherings and retail businesses have had a devastating impact on the economy, slashing some Aus\$4 billion (\$2.5 billion) per week from economic activity.

Parts of the country have begun relaxing the restrictions, with some cafes, pubs and restaurants opening to small groups from Friday.

France unveils 1.3 billion euros investment plan for tourism sector



Construction machineries are seen in action on the deserted beach of the Promenade des Anglais in Nice

Reuters | Paris

The French government yesterday unveiled a 1.3 billion euros (\$1.4 bn) investment plan for the country's tourism sector, which has been hit hard by the coronavirus crisis and the resulting shutdown in tourist attractions and hotels.

"What is good for the tourism industry, is often good for the whole of France," said Prime Minister Edouard Philippe.

Nearly 90 million foreign tourists visited France in 2018, making it the most visited country in the world, according to government data. Tourism accounts for about 7 per cent of France's 2.3 trillion euro economy.

Maduro claims Guaido planned Venezuela 'invasion' while at White House



Nicolas Maduro
Caracas

Venezuela President Nicolas Maduro alleged Wednesday that opposition leader Juan Guaido met with a former member of the US Army special forces at the White House to plan a failed sea invasion of the Caribbean country.

Maduro claimed the meeting occurred when Guaido, the legislative leader who is supported by the US and around fifty other countries as the interim president of Venezuela, visited the US president in Washington in February.

"It was at the White House on February 4 of this year, 2020, that Juan Guaido met with Jordan Goudreau" the leftist leader said, referring to the former special forces member who Venezuela has alleged organized and trained a mercenary force to carry out the invasion.

The meeting, Maduro said, was "at the order of Donald Trump to come up with the plan of attack."

According to Maduro, "it would be very easy to verify" Goudreau's presence at the White House between 2019 and 2020 and "in which room he met with Mr Guaido."

The White House did not immediately respond to AFP's request for comment.

Major' mental health crisis looming from Corona: UN

● Urges countries to include access to psychosocial support and emergency mental care

AFP | Geneva

The coronavirus outbreak risks sparking a major global mental health crisis, the United Nations warned Thursday, calling for urgent action to address the psychological suffering brought on by the pandemic.

While protecting physical health has been the main concern during the first months of the crisis, it is also placing huge mental strains on large swathes of the global population, the UN said in policy brief.

"After decades of neglect and underinvestment in mental health services, the COVID-19 pandemic is now hitting families and communities with additional mental stress," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned in a video message launching the brief.

"Even when the pandemic is brought under control, grief, anxiety and depression will continue to affect people and communities," he said.

The UN brief highlighted the mental strains on people fearing that they or loved ones will be infected or die from the novel coronavirus, which has killed nearly 300,000 people worldwide since it first emerged in China late last year.

It also pointed to the psychological impact on vast numbers of people who have lost or are at risk of losing their livelihoods,



The elderly and people with pre-existing conditions, who are considered particularly at risk from the virus, meanwhile face increased stress over the threat of infection

have been separated from loved ones or have suffered under drastic lockdown orders.

'Tremendous stress'

"We know that the current situations, the fear and uncertainty, the economic turmoil -- they all cause or could cause psychological distress," Devora Kestel, head of the World Health Organization's mental health and substance use department, told a virtual briefing.

Health care workers and first responders -- operating under "tremendous stress" -- are particularly vulnerable, Kestel said, pointing to news reports indicating rises in suicides among medical workers.

A whole host of other groups also face particular psychological challenges brought on by the crisis.

Children being kept out of school, for instance, face uncertainty and anxiety.

Along with women, they also face a heightened risk of domestic abuse as people spend

lengthy amounts of time cooped up at home.

The elderly and people with pre-existing conditions, who are considered particularly at risk from the virus, meanwhile face increased stress over the threat of infection.

And people with pre-existing psychological issues could see them exacerbated, while accessing their usual treatment and face-to-face therapy may no longer be possible.

Yesterday's policy brief pointed to a range of national studies indicating that mental distress is mounting rapidly.

The UN brief stressed the need for countries to include access to psychosocial support and emergency mental care in all aspects of their response to the pandemic.

It called for a significant hike in investments in this area, pointing out that before the crisis, countries on average dedicated only two percent of their public health budgets to mental health support.

News in brief

Fauci's call for cautious reopening 'not acceptable': Trump

US President Donald Trump says he finds top medical advisor Anthony Fauci's latest call for a highly cautious reopening "not acceptable," as he promotes the reopening of schools during a meeting with the governors of Colorado and North Dakota in the Cabinet Room of the White House.

Anti-lockdown protesters in Guinea on Wednesday forced open a handful of mosques that had been shut for weeks, according to witnesses, demonstrators and a local official. It came a day after seven people were killed in clashes with police during protests against roadblocks set up during the pandemic and frequent power cuts in the impoverished West African country. The mosques had been closed since late March as part of measures to control the spread of the deadly disease

New Zealanders mingled with friends and hit the shopping malls for the first time in seven weeks as a national lockdown ended and businesses faced a "new normal" minimising the constant threat of coronavirus. A long-awaited haircut was the top priority for many Kiwis after almost two months in isolation, with queues of tangle-headed customers forming at barbers before dawn.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe lifted a state of emergency in large parts of the country on Thursday but said it would remain in place in Tokyo until the novel coronavirus is contained. Abe lifted the emergency in 39 of Japan's 47 prefectures but left it in force in the capital and in the second-largest urban area of Osaka, as he tries to cushion the economic blow while stopping the virus.

Japan lifts virus emergency in most areas

Maldives extends lockdown

The Maldives extended its lockdown for another two weeks as the former tourist hotspot reported its fourth coronavirus fatality and the pandemic spread rapidly in the congested capital Male.

Bangladesh has prepared a huge field hospital in three weeks to treat coronavirus patients in an attempt to fight the intensifying outbreak in the country. The South Asian nation has reported nearly 18,000 infections and 269 deaths from COVID-19 despite a countrywide lockdown, but critics say the numbers are far lower than the true virus figures because of insufficient testing.

Nicaragua released more than 2,800 prisoners to house arrest on Wednesday to contain the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, but advocates said there were no political prisoners among them. Authorities have jailed at least 86 opposition figures and supporters of rights groups under the government of Daniel Ortega -- a former rebel hero who has been in power since 2007 and is now accused of running a repressive dictatorship.

Russia has sent 25,000 tonnes of wheat in humanitarian aid to North Korea after last year's drought hit its rice production, the Russian embassy to North Korea said on social media yesterday.

London's "Square Mile" financial district said it will close some streets to cars to create more space for pedestrians and cyclists so that workers can observe social distancing when the coronavirus lockdown is lifted. Britain began easing restrictions this week but said people who can work from home should continue to do so.

Taliban claim deadly attack on Afghan army base



A woman sits next to newborn babies who lost their mothers following a suicide attack in a maternity hospital, in Kabul

Khost | Afghanistan

The Taliban said it carried out a deadly attack yesterday on an Afghan army base after the government ordered forces to resume strikes against the militants.

Afghan officials said a truck bomb targeted an army base in the eastern city of Gardez, killing five civilians and wounding 19 -- including five army personnel.

It comes after a particularly violent week which saw President Ashraf Ghani rescind the government's recent "defensive" stance aimed at promoting peace talks with the Taliban, and order troops back onto the offensive.

Provincial health director

Welayat Khan Ahmadzai confirmed the death toll, but the Taliban claimed "tens of soldiers were killed and wounded" and denied reports any civilians died.

"After the announcement of the offensive... a martyrdom attack was carried out against an important military headquarters of the Kabul administration," Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said in a WhatsApp message to media on Thursday.

The defence ministry said a suicide bomber detonated the explosive-laden truck before reaching the army base.

On Tuesday, gunmen stormed a hospital in Kabul killing at least 24 people, including infants and nurses.

Corona vaccine possible in about a year, says EU agency

Reuters | Amsterdam/Brussels

A vaccine to counter the new coronavirus could be approved in about a year in an "optimistic" scenario, an agency which approves medicines for the European Union said yesterday.

The European Union, hard hit by COVID-19, fears it may not have sufficient supplies, especially if a vaccine were developed in the United States or China.

The European Medicines Agency, in communication with 33 developers, was doing all it could to speed up the approval process, the EMA's head of vaccines, Marco Cavaleri, said, but he was sceptical of claims any could be ready by September.

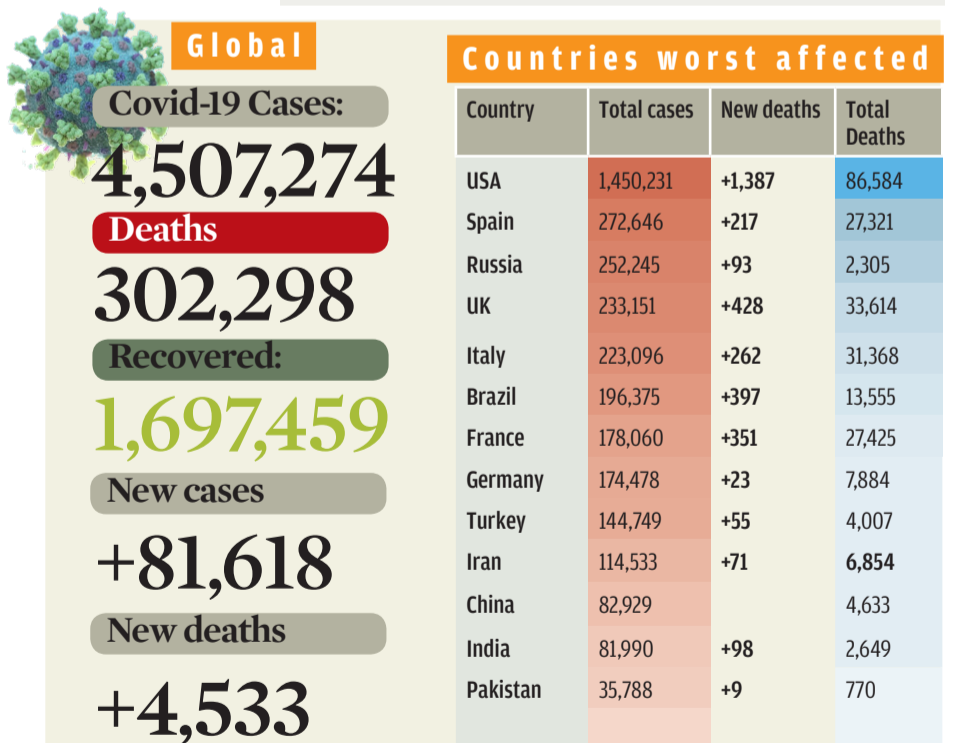
"For vaccines, since the development has to start from scratch ... we might look from an optimistic side in a year from now, so beginning of 2021," he told journalists.

He ruled out the possibility of skipping the third phase of a vaccine trial.

The EMA is also looking at 115 different therapeutics, or treatments, for the coronavirus, which has killed nearly 300,000 deaths globally, according to World Health Organization data.

Cavaleri said some of those therapeutics could be approved in Europe as early as this summer, but he did not specify which.

A leading EU lawmaker said the European Union should circumvent pharmaceutical companies' intellectual property rights if a vaccine were developed outside the bloc, a new sign of EU fears of lagging behind in the global race.



Middle East Figures as of closing

Country	Total cases	new cases	Total deaths	New Deaths	Total recovered	Active cases	Serious Critical	Tot cases/1m pop
Bahrain	6,069	+253	10		2,220	3,839	6	3,567
Saudi Arabia	46,869	+2,039	283	+10	19,051	27,535	156	1,346
UAE	21,084	+698	208	+2	6,930	13,946	1	2,132
Kuwait	11,975	+947	88	+6	3,451	8,436	175	2,804
Oman	4,341	+322	17		1,303	3,021	31	850
Egypt	10,829	+398	571	+15	2,626	7,632	41	106

Cardboard fans, piped applause: football looks to liven up empty stands



Cardboard cut-outs with portraits of Borussia Moenchengladbach's supporters are seen at the Borussia Park football stadium

Reuters | Bern

When Borussia Moenchengladbach met neighbours Cologne in the Bundesliga's first-ever game without fans back in March, even the referee missed the crowd.

"Football has lost half its value," said Deniz Aytikin - despite being spared the customary abuse from the stands.

Since then, it has become increasingly clear that football will have to be played behind closed doors until a major change in the course of the coronavirus pandemic - and that some creativity will be needed to provide a little atmosphere.

From cardboard cut-outs of real fans to an app allowing supporters to influence the volume of noise piped into stadiums, people are developing ideas for how to put some matchday atmosphere back into the stadiums -- though whether their ideas are accepted is a different matter.

In Belarus, the only European league to plough on through the global health crisis, Dinamo Brest filled the stands with mannequins sporting cut-out portraits of real supporters.

Moenchengladbach will follow suit when the Bundesliga becomes the first of Europe's major leagues to restart on Saturday.

For 19 euros, the club offers to put a "cardboard you" in the stands - and visiting teams' fans can book cut-outs for the away end. The club said more than 12,000 such effigies have been ordered so far.

"The campaign organisers are

regularly overrun with orders," said Gladbach fan representative Thomas Weinmann.

But for many, the real problem of "ghost matches" is the lack of noise and eerie atmosphere with the shouts of players and coaching staff echoing around deserted arenas.

Cologne coach Markus Gisdol suggested this could even lead to frayed tempers.

"Everyone on the sidelines was a little more irritable than usual because you could hear more of what the opposing bench were saying and what the officials were saying to each other," he said after the Moenchengladbach game.

On the other hand, he said the lack of crowd noise would take players "back to their roots."

"Without fans, the players have to squeeze out of themselves the same qualities that turned them into Bundesliga professionals."

One company though - Munich-based hack-CARE - has developed an app which it says produces piped crowd noise based on the reactions of supporters watching on their sofas.

Fans who download its Myapplause app choose which club to support and which match to watch, and then get four options: cheer, clap, sing or whistle.

The app can support up to 350,000 users per match and, depending on the number of clicks and sound distribution, piped crowd noise is produced both at users' homes and in the stadium.

"We tested it in two Bundesliga stadiums, we were live and it

went really well," Viktor Mraz, one of the developers, told Reuters. "You press a button and the whole stadium is cheering."

He said talks were underway with all of Germany's big clubs.

"Everybody is talking to us, even other sports," he said. "A lot of people need to agree - the players need to agree - the referees... - so I guess we will start without any sounds in the stadium," he said.

Mraz added that different sounds could be played in different parts of the stadium and sound levels adjusted to recreate the impression of having home and away support.

"The songs for one team come over the left loudspeaker, the songs for the other come over the right loudspeaker, so you have the separation of blocks like you would usually have in the stadium," he said.

Still, issues remain. Some years ago, Swiss broadcaster SRF apologised for adding fake crowd noise to the highlights of an FC Zurich-Grasshoppers derby where fans boycotted the start of the game over ticket prices.

And the last word may rest with the German Football League, which said it remains "strongly opposed" to the idea of piped noise.

"Our fans can't be replaced by any virtual audience, therefore we strongly discourage our clubs from using any artificial crowd noise," a spokeswoman told Reuters.

"We can't force the clubs not to use it - but we think they got the point."

West Indies players will not be forced to tour England: chief

AFP | London

West Indies cricketers will not be "coerced" into touring England if they are reluctant to do so during the coronavirus crisis, according to West Indies chief executive Johnny Grave.

The Caribbean side are due to travel to play a three-Test series, which has been postponed until July at the earliest.

Grave said a "wide pool" of players had been consulted and none of them would be obliged to tour.

"There will be no coercing players into this tour," Grave told BBC Radio.

"If you grow up in a country where the population might only be 60,000 or 70,000 people, to be thinking the UK has had over 30,000 deaths is a massive figure."

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) is considering the use of bio-secure venues and quarantining players. Matches would likely be staged behind closed doors.

Grave said he was optimistic



West Indies' players celebrate during a match against Sri Lanka (file photo)

the series would go ahead but that would depend on whether it was deemed safe.

"The ECB (England and Wales Cricket Board) have got a long way to go to get UK government approval to be absolutely certain that bio-secure cricket will

work," he said.

Grave admitted that with West Indies players coming from different islands that have different levels of restrictions due to the virus, getting them onto one plane would be a challenge but not "insurmountable."

"The players would be very much in a bubble," said Grave.

"We said to the ECB we'd want four weeks of preparation before the first Test. We're probably looking at three back-to-back Test matches.

Du Plessis proposes two weeks' quarantine for T20 World Cup

AFP | London

Former South Africa skipper Faf du Plessis said quarantining players for two weeks before and after the Twenty20 World Cup could allow it to take place in Australia this year despite the coronavirus

pandemic.

The tournament is due to be played in October-November but there is uncertainty after the cancellation of other major sporting events. Some countries have also grounded international flights.

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SUDOKU

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

Yesterday's solution

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

How to play

Place a number in the empty boxes in such a way that each row across, each column down and each 9-box square contains all of the numbers from one to nine.

CROSSWORD

Across

1- Speed ratio; 5- Pianist Peter; 9- Legal matter; 12- Glow; 13- Peace goddess; 15- Remedy; 16- Hang around; 17- Counterfeit; 18- Opera set in Egypt; 19- Spider's traps; 21- Chest related; 23- Wight or Man; 24- Diamond authority; 25- Disinclined; 28- Thankful; 33- Scuffle; 34- Laugh heartily; 35- Chuck; 36- Neither Rep. nor Dem.; 37- Crowd together; 38- Doo-wop syllable; 39- Hard fatty tissue; 41- Actress Swenson; 42- Attack on all sides; 44- Sing for; 46- Passenger ships; 47- Direct a gun; 48- Titanic's undoing; 49- Mafioso; 53- Without bound; 57- Writer Wiesel; 58- Dictation taker; 60- About; 61- ... well...; 62- Conger catcher; 63- Arrest; 64- ... kwon do; 65- Fill to surfjet; 66- Hard, in Havana;

Down

1- Not fem.; 2- Mercury or Saturn; 3- Kvetch or whinge; 4- Out of control; 5- Bite gently; 6- Uneven; 7- Rule, for short; 8- Weight; 9- Undoing; 10- Mother of the Valkyries; 11- Authenticating mark; 14- Tidal river; 15- Floor covering; 20- "... quam videri" (North Carolina's motto); 22- CPR giver; 25- Off-track; 26- Locale; 27- Senior; 28- Small canyon; 29- ... avis; 30- "Damn Yankees" choreographer; 31- Doorkeeper; 32- Atty.-to-be exams; 34- Rip apart; 37- Like some cats; 40- Tantalizes; 42- Feathered creature; 43- Division of the United Kingdom; 45- It may be picked; 46- Poe maiden; 48- "John Brown's Body" poet; 49- Crux; 50- Earthen pot; 51- Ill humor; 52- Hwys; 54- Biblical birthright seller; 55- Agitate; 56- Go it alone; 59- Guido's high note;

Yesterday's solution

S	E	R	A	B	A	L	I	U	R	G	E
U	S	E	R	E	V	A	D	E	N	A	T
R	A	N	T	C	O	R	A	L	K	N	O
A	U	D	I	A	I	D	D	A	N	I	S
				S	O	L	D	S	E	G	O
				R	E	A	L	M	W	E	R
				M	A	I	N	E	K	E	E
				I	N	D	U	N	I	T	Y
				A	C	E	S	N	E	R	O
				S	H	R	E	D	E	D	H
				A	Y	E	S	E	I	R	E
				S	H	O	W	E	R	B	L
				T	I	D	E	G	N	A	S
				E	V	O	E	O	A	K	I
				N	E	R	D	B	E	E	R

With little competition, the Bundesliga goes global

AFP | Paris

German football will find itself in an unaccustomed global spotlight this weekend as audiences starved of live football turn to the only major European league back in action.

With the Premier League, Spain's La Liga and Serie A in Italy all still sidelined by the coronavirus pandemic, the Bundesliga will take centre stage on Saturday.

Even in Brazil, media coverage has switched from domestic football stories to what TV viewers can expect to see when Borussia Dortmund meet Schalke in the biggest match of the opening day, albeit it without spectators in the stadium.

Cable channel Fox Sports, which holds exclusive rights to show the Bundesliga in Brazil, will be showing the Ruhr Derby at 9:30 am local time. Its website already features a lengthy article about the games entitled "The wait will soon be over".

Even Brazil's biggest media group, Globo, is getting in on the act with interviews with four Brazilians who play for Bun-

desliga clubs, including Wolfsburg midfielder William, who admitted players were "a little bit scared" about the implications for their health.

In India, foreign football leagues have found a market in India's urban youth who keenly follow the Premier League and support clubs like Chelsea, Liverpool and Manchester United. But a few of these fans also watch La Liga and Bundesliga.

"I am desperately waiting for the Bundesliga to start this weekend. I am thirsty for live football action in this lockdown," Amjad Rehan Ibrahim, a student of Delhi University, told AFP.

'A barometer'

Indian international forward Jeje Lalpekhlua said he would also be tuning in to the coverage on Indian broadcasters Star Sports and Hotstar: "It's difficult without football for so long. I am surely going to watch it."

In Japan, rightsholder Sky Perfect is going to show two Bundesliga matches this weekend free of charge.

In Europe too, the matches in Germany will provide a



The quarantine and social distancing measures that Bundesliga clubs have instituted are also being scrutinised in Italy and Spain, whose leagues are some way from being able to consider resuming

much-needed fix of live sport.

Adolfo Barbero, who commentates on Bundesliga games for the Spanish channel Movistar+, said: "I can assure you that I haven't seen this level of interest in the Bundesliga in 20 years. Normally people support Bayern Munich, Dortmund or even Bayer Leverkusen and that's it."

"But now they are also looking forward to seeing Fortuna Dusseldorf and Paderborn. It's



Bayern Munich players celebrate after a match

crazy."

In Mexico, football journalists are grateful for something to cover -- and the sorely-missed revenue live sport generates.

"For those of us who make a living from football the fact there hasn't been any activity really affects us. A weekend without football is really difficult," said Emilio Fernando Alonso, a Mexican reporter for ESPN.

In China, where the Super League might not begin until June, German football's meticulously planned return is being closely watched.

Writing in the Oriental Sports Daily, columnist Ji Yuyang said the biggest challenge for the Bundesliga was not restarting during the pandemic, but being able to outlast it because of financial pressures that clubs were facing due to the health crisis.

"Half of the teams in the top two leagues are in danger of going bankrupt, according to estimates in Germany," Ji wrote.

"So for many German clubs, whether it was better to wait for failure or risk restarting, they chose the latter."

The quarantine and social distancing measures that Bundesliga clubs have instituted are also being scrutinised in Italy and Spain, whose leagues are some

way from being able to consider resuming.

"It will be a barometer, the reference point for all the others... if it all goes well it will be a great success and if there's a big problem it will have a similarly powerful negative effect," Movistar+ commentator Barbero said.



Bayern Munich players during a training session (file photo)



Borussia Dortmund players during training (file photo)

Ronaldinho closing in on 70 days detention in Paraguay

AFP | Asuncion

Brazilian great Ronaldinho's lawyers are hoping the former world player of the year will be allowed to go home after more than two months of detention in Paraguay over a forged passport.

"We're hoping to convince the prosecution to allow Ronaldinho and his brother to return to their country. We can do nothing but wait for the investigation to end," a defense source told AFP.

Former Barcelona, AC Milan and Paris Saint-Germain star Ronaldinho and his brother, Robert de Assis Moreira, are facing up to five years in jail if convicted.

The brothers spent more than a month behind bars after they were accused of entering Paraguay in possession of false passports.

The 2005 Ballon d'Or winner and his brother posted bail of \$1.6 million and have been under house arrest at the plush Palmaroga Hotel in the historic centre of the Paraguayan capital Asuncion since April 7.

The public prosecutor has six



Ronaldinho of Brazil listens during an interview (file photo)

months to investigate the case, and has ordered the arrest of 18 in connection with it.

"There is not one single serious proof that incriminates him," Rogelio Delgado, president of Paraguay's footballers union told AFP.

"Although he has a luxury prison, it's very unfair that he's still being detained," added Delgado, a former Paraguay international.

The 40-year-old Ronaldinho has been keeping a low profile since being released from behind bars, not least because of coronavirus lockdown meas-

ures. "I was completely caught off guard when I found out that these passports were not valid," Ronaldinho told Paraguayan newspaper ABC last month in his only public statement since his release.

Ronaldinho, considered one of the greatest footballers of all time, was crucial in Brazil's 2002 World Cup win.

He and sibling Robert -- who is also his business manager -- initially encountered no problems after arriving in Asuncion from neighboring Brazil on March 4.

'A lot of regrets' - tennis star Osaka says shyness is holding her back

AFP | Los Angeles

Former world number one Naomi Osaka has admitted having "a lot of regrets" and said she's soul-searching during the coronavirus lockdown for ways to become more assertive.

The 22-year-old Japanese, who stormed to prominence by winning back-to-back Grand Slam titles at the 2018 US Open and 2019 Australian Open, said she believed her shyness was holding her back.

"I think people know me as being really shy," she told CNN Sport from her home in Los Angeles.

"I want to also take the quarantine time to just think about everything, and for me, I have a lot of regrets before I go to sleep.

"And most of the regrets is due to (the fact) that I don't speak out about what I'm thinking."

The soft-spoken Osaka has spoken candidly about her struggles with success, and said last year that she felt depressed after reaching world number one following her win in Australia.



Naomi Osaka hits a return during a match (file photo)

Part of me is a bit concerned (about not playing tennis), but also I know that other players are in the same position as me, probably

NAOMI OSAKA

She said she would feel more comfortable if she spoke up and took more control of what was

happening around her.

"There's a lot of times where I see myself in situations where I could have put my input in, but instead I've held my tongue and things kept moving in a way that I didn't really enjoy," she said.

"I feel like if I asserted myself, I would have gotten the opportunity to see what would have happened."

With return dates for tennis still uncertain, Osaka said she was using the unexpected free time to try new things, like drawing and sketching.

KHK Heroes supports the Bahrain Parents Care Society with delivery of Al Osra Restaurant meals



KHK Heroes delivery

TDT | Manama

KHK Heroes volunteers are supporting the Bahrain Parents Care Society with delivery of meals provided by Al Osra Restaurant's Feed the Needy Campaign.

Al Osra Restaurant managing editor Miraz Ibrahim spoke of the importance of giving in this time of need, "everyone has been affected by this Pandemic, but some more than others - to the point where it's become hard to provide for their families and that is why we have initiated Al Osra Restaurant's Feed the Needy Campaign, we all need to do our part."

Initiated by HH Shaikh Khalid bin Hamad Al Khalifa

to support the vision of HRH Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince, Deputy Supreme Commander, and First Deputy Premier and HH Shaikh Nasser bin Hamad Al Khalifa, His Majesty the King's Representative for Charity Works and Youth Affairs, National Security Advisor and President of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports, KHK Heroes has called on the nation for a united cause, helping those most vulnerable during the Coronavirus Pandemic.

Public can take part in the challenge by making donations, volunteering time to KHK Heroes or post a video online and nominate someone to pay it forward.

Hamilton tops Sunday Times sportspersons' rich list



Mercedes driver Lewis Hamilton is carried by fans after winning the British Formula One Grand Prix at Silverstone, England (file photo)

Reuters | London

Six-times Formula One world champion Lewis Hamilton is the richest sportsperson in the United Kingdom with a net worth of 224 million pounds (\$275.6 million), according to The Sunday Times newspaper's Rich List [thesundaytimes.co.uk/sport-richlist](https://www.sundaytimes.co.uk/sport-richlist).

Hamilton, who signed a new contract with Mercedes in 2018 worth up to 40 million pounds a year, saw his net worth rise by 37 million pounds over the last year.

Rory McIlroy, who returned to the top of golf's world rankings in February for the first time since 2015, is the only

other sportsperson to feature on the main Rich List with a net worth of 170 million pounds.

Wales soccer player Gareth Bale, who earns 350,000 pounds per week after tax at Real Madrid, has a net worth of 114 million pounds and is the richest sportsperson aged 30 or under.

The Young Rich List is dominated by sports personalities who account for 18 of the 50 places, with world heavyweight boxing champion Anthony Joshua the only non-footballer to make the cut.

Joshua earned an estimated 78 million pounds from his two fights with Andy Ruiz Jr last year, taking his net worth to 107 million pounds.

Sainz to succeed Vettel at Ferrari

Daniel Ricciardo will swap Renault for McLaren next season

AFP | London

Spanish driver Carlos Sainz will replace four-time Formula One world champion Sebastian Vettel at Ferrari next season, while Daniel Ricciardo has signed a "multi-year" deal with McLaren for 2021.

Sainz, 25, will leave McLaren following the 2020 season to partner 22-year-old Charles Leclerc at Ferrari, forming the team's youngest pairing in the past 50 years.

"With five seasons already behind him, Carlos has proved to be very talented and has shown that he has the technical ability and the right attributes to make him an ideal fit with our family," Ferrari team boss Mattia Binotto said in a statement yesterday.

"We've embarked on a new cycle with the aim of getting back to the top in Formula 1. It will be a long journey, not without its difficulties," he added, referring to the additional challenges created by the coronavirus pandemic.

"We believe that a driver pairing with the talent and personality of Charles and Carlos... will be the best possible combination to help us reach the goals we have set ourselves."

Sainz emerged in pole position to succeed Vettel at Maranello after the German announced Tuesday he was quitting Ferrari after talks over a new contract broke down.

Sainz, whose father, also Carlos, is a two-time world rally champion, has previously driven for Red Bull's feeder team Toro Rosso and Renault before impressing with McLaren last season.

He secured the once all-con-



(L-R) Max Verstappen, Carlos Sainz and Daniel Ricciardo are seen during a walk in Circuit de Monaco (file photo)

quering British team's first podium place in almost six years in Brazil last year.

Signing Sainz will also end any lingering speculation about six-time champion Lewis Hamilton leaving Mercedes for Ferrari.

"I am very happy that I will be driving for Scuderia Ferrari in 2021 and I'm excited about my future with the team," said Sainz.

"I still have an important year ahead with McLaren Racing and I'm really looking forward to going racing again with them this season."

Domino effect

Australian Ricciardo will drive for McLaren next season when he takes over the seat left vacant by Sainz.

Ricciardo, 30, will line up alongside Britain's Lando Norris, 20, in 2021 after he leaves Renault at the end of this sea-



Carlos Sainz finished sixth in the Formula One drivers' championship in 2019

son.

"Daniel is a proven race-winner and his experience, commitment and energy will be a valuable addition to McLaren and our mission to return to the front of the field," said McLaren team principal Andreas Seidl.

"With Daniel and Lando as teammates, I believe we have two racers who will continue to excite our fans and help the team grow."

Daniel Kinahan named special advisor to KHK Sports

TDT | Manama

International boxing power broker, Daniel Kinahan, has been appointed as special advisor to KHK Sports in Bahrain.

Kinahan has been involved in the world of combat sports, at the highest levels, since his earlier days as one of the original founders of MTK Global before branching away and advising some of the biggest names and organizations in the industry for over a decade and has been instrumental in securing some of the biggest global events in the sport. As advisor for Top Rank in the MENA region, his expertise and connections will strengthen the KHK Sports brand and immediately expand its international reach.

Khalid bin Hamad Al Khalifa Sports (KHK Sports) is a vision of His Highness Shaikh Khalid bin Hamad Al Khalifa, First Deputy President of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports, President of the Bahrain Olympic Committee and Founder of BRAVE Combat Federation.

In this significant move, Kinahan's role will advise across KHK Sports entire portfolio, encompassing KHK MMA, KHK Boxing and Mixed Martial Arts Promotion and BRAVE Combat Federation.

KHK Sports focuses on developing the national sports economy in nineteen nations, bringing together the FDI, trade relationships and tourism exposure through sports.

The organisation is known for developing sports business, primarily in combat sports. KHK Sports holds international world events and owns the largest sports media property in the Middle East.

KHK Sports supports local and international athletes, advances and develops mixed martial arts in Bahrain at all levels, including establishing a national team and alongside bringing in global talent and events to the and also encourages the youth of Bahrain to engage and compete in sports.

Under KHK Sports, the organization has successfully launched KHK MMA, KHK Boxing, KHK Racing, KHK Wrestling, KHK Cricket and Mixed Martial Arts Promotion BRAVE Combat Federation, in addition to investing in many other areas including European Soccer Clubs.

His Highness recognizes the importance of sporting events in promoting the Kingdom of Bahrain globally and enhancing the Kingdom's tourism industry and the economy. His Highness appreciates the tremendous val-

I look forward to working with the team to realise these dreams and further build Bahrain combat sports into a globally recognized presence

DANIEL KINAHAN

Kinahan to the KHK Family. It is a pleasure to have him on board. His involvement in combat sports, his achievements and his knowledge is what we need for our vision for KHK sports. Daniel has the same vision for sports as us; changing lives, equal opportunities, making dreams come true and uniting the world through sports. KHK SPORTS are happy to officially have Kinahan as our special advisor."

ue. Kinahan will lend to the organization.

HH Shaikh Khalid bin Hamad Al Khalifa said, "Sports plays a major part in shaping our youth and defining the future of the world. With an infrastructure that can evolve, the sports provide opportunity, regardless of race, religion or even marketability; and simply based on talent and becoming a global project for uniting the world. It is about hope and belief that the impossible does not exist. This will be our vision for KHK sports to achieve and with a great team we can."

Speaking on the announcement, CEO of KHK Sports, KHK MMA and President of BRAVE Combat Federation, Mohammed Shahid said, "I would like to officially welcome Daniel

for me to work with HH Shaikh Khalid bin Hamad Al Khalifa, Mohammed Shahid and the entire team at KHK Sports. KHK Sports has made an impressive mark on the world of combat sports and has fantastic ambitions to grow into a global powerhouse. I look forward to working with the team to realise these dreams and further build Bahrain combat sports into a globally recognized presence. We will create opportunities for Bahraini fighters on the international stage whilst attracting the biggest names in the sport to the Kingdom. HH Shaikh Khalid has been visionary in his approach to the sport and has built KHK Sports out of passion which is paramount to continued growth and inspiration of the people of Bahrain."