



baseball
Page 15



soccer
Pages 14&16

Trump threatens permanent freeze on WHO funding

Probe agreed

GENEVA, May 19, (AP): The World Health Organization bowed to calls from most of its member states to launch an independent probe into how it managed the international response to the coronavirus, which has been clouded by finger-pointing between the U.S. and China over a pandemic that has killed over 300,000 people and leveled the global economy.

The "comprehensive evaluation," sought by a coalition of African, European and other countries, is intended to review "lessons learned" from WHO's coordination of the global response to COVID-19, but would stop short of looking into contentious issues such as the origins of the new coronavirus. U.S. President Donald Trump has claimed he has proof suggesting the coronavirus originated in a lab in China while the scientific community has insisted all evidence to date shows the virus likely jumped into humans from animals.

In Washington on Monday, Trump faulted WHO for having done "a very sad job" and said he was considering whether to cut the annual U.S. funding from \$450 million a year to \$40 million.

"They gave us a lot of bad advice, terrible advice," he said. "They were wrong so much, always on the side of China."

Later Monday, Trump tweeted a letter he had sent WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. In the letter, Trump said "the only way forward" is if WHO "can actually demonstrate independence from China."

Trump said that unless WHO commits to "substantive improvements over the next 30 days," he will make a temporary suspension of U.S. funding permanent.

WHO's normally bureaucratic annual assembly this week has been overshadowed by mutual recriminations and political sniping between the U.S. and China. Trump has repeatedly attacked WHO, claiming that it helped China conceal the extent of the coronavirus pandemic in its early stages. Several Republican lawmakers have called on Tedros to resign.

U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar said Monday it was time to be frank about why COVID-19 has "spun out of control."

"There was a failure by this organization to obtain the information that the world needed and that failure cost many lives," Azar said. Speaking hours after Chinese President Xi Jinping announced China would provide \$2 billion to help respond to the outbreak and its economic fallout, Azar said the U.S. had allocated \$9 billion to coronavirus containment efforts around the world.

Tedros said he would launch an independent evaluation of WHO's response "at the earliest appropriate moment" - alluding to findings published Monday in a first report by an oversight advisory body commissioned to look into WHO's response.

The 11-page report raised questions such as whether WHO's warning system for alerting the world to outbreaks is adequate, and suggested member states might need to "reassess" WHO's role in providing travel advice to countries.

In his opening remarks at the WHO meeting, Tedros held firm and sought to focus on the bigger troubles posed by the outbreak, saying "we have been humbled by this very small microbe."

"This contagion exposes the fault lines, inequalities, injustices and contradictions of our modern world," Tedros said. "And geopolitical divisions have been thrown into sharp relief."

China, meanwhile, sought to divert attention to its renewed efforts to slow the coronavirus pandemic, with Xi announcing the \$2 billion outlay over two years to fight it. Last year, China donated about \$86 million to WHO.

U.S. National Security Council spokesman John Ullyot characterized China's newly announced contribution as "a token to distract from calls from a growing number of nations demanding accountability for the Chinese

Opinion

Prepare, catch up; more is yet to come

By Ahmed Al-Jarallah
Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times

THE effects of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) have pushed the world's refresh button, something that happens once every century. Testimony to that fact is that the world, one century ago after the end of the First World War which had claimed millions of lives, went on to battle the "Spanish Flu" that took the lives of more than 60 million people all around the world.

However, people managed to coexist with this virus after a period of time. In fact, this deadly flu had sparked a major economic renaissance in the 1920s due to the reconstruction of Europe. People eventually started to experience better living standards and financial well-being that gave them the appetite to spend. It is said that automobile factories used to produce a car every ten seconds during the period between 1920 and 1929.

At that stage, the demand for expensive goods and the construction of palaces and houses increased. However, all this changed with the economic setback suffered by the United States of America in 1929 when stock prices tumbled and the so-called "The Great Depression" or "the year of depression", as the Americans call it, began due to the frenzy in making quick profits through stock trading fueled by consumption craze.

The effects of the Great Depression in the US had extended to Europe, rendering the world to change its popular mood and political trends, and causing extremist movements to emerge. This facilitated the rise in power for people like Hitler's Nazi in Germany and Mussolini's fascism in Italy, let alone the surge of racism and anti-semitic rhetoric that, after ten years, ignited the Second World War during which millions lost their lives and countries were ruined.

The effects of that war reached such an extent that Europe was unable to reconstruct what was destroyed without the help of the Americans. It was at that point the victors set in motion the project to establish a Jewish state in Palestine in a bid to come up with an historic solution to solve the crisis between Europe and the Jews.

After the war, and with the 1948 Marshall Plan (US foreign aid to Western Europe), a new economic renaissance began. Productive sectors in urgent need of energy expanded and the oil industry flourished, especially in the Arabian Gulf region.

This renaissance helped change the region where great financial prosperity was witnessed. It changed the way of life in the region, and developmental projects started increasing significantly in Kuwait, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the rest of the Gulf countries that were not affected much by the Second World War.

During the current COVID-19 crisis, there are many reasons for optimism. This is because, despite the great losses in all aspects and in the absence of a vaccine for eradicating coronavirus that continues to take lives, there are signs of a change for the better.

It is true that the price may be exorbitant, but since when did humanity fail to pay such a price at every historic turn in the world?

Since the beginning of this pandemic, we have been witnessing changes at the level of international relations, new alignments, and various economic alliances. Societies have started seeking their safety by relying on themselves. This invisible virus has led individuals to alter their ways of life and even spendings.

However, despite all this, the changes that ended yesterday's crises will not be a replica of the variables of today. There will be no fall of empires, as in the case with the Ottoman Empire. There will neither be division within the Arab world similar to the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement nor religious wars. Also, there won't be another Hitler or another Mussolini in this planet.

There is no doubt that international relations are changing; health and medical technologies have become a greater area of human concern. This brings to mind the saying: "Prepare yourselves and catch up before you find yourselves outdated, more greater is yet to come."

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Issues dent tech-assisted 'tracking' for coronavirus

PROVIDENCE, Rhode Island, May 19, (AP): Harnessing today's technology to the task of fighting the coronavirus pandemic is turning out to be more complicated than it first appeared.

The first U.S. states that rolled out smartphone apps for tracing the contacts of COVID-19 patients are dealing with technical glitches and a general lack of interest by their residents. A second wave of tech-assisted pandemic surveillance tools is on its way, this time with the imprimatur of tech giants Apple and Google. But those face their own issues, among them potential accuracy problems and the fact that they won't share any information with governments that could help track the spread of the illness.

Contact tracing is a pillar of infection control. It's traditionally conducted by trained public health workers who interview those who may have been exposed, then urge them to get tested and isolate themselves. Some estimates call for as many as 300,000 U.S. workers to do the work effectively, but so far those efforts have lagged.

Other tech companies like Salesforce have offered database tools to assist manual tracing efforts, although those also raise privacy concerns because of the need to collect and store detailed information about people's social connections, health status and whereabouts.

Privacy advocates warn that the danger of creating new government surveillance powers for the pandemic could lead to much bigger problems in the future.

In a new policy paper shared with The Associated Press, the American Civil Liberties Union is warning state governments to tread more carefully and establish stricter privacy procedures before deploying technology meant to detect and curb new coronavirus outbreaks.

Even the most privacy-minded tools, such as those to be released soon by Apple and Google, require constraints so that they don't become instruments of surveillance or oppression. "The risks of getting it wrong are enormous," said Neema Singh Guliani, a senior legislative counsel with the ACLU.

ACLU's report says the worst location-tracking technology should be rejected outright, such as apps that track individual movements via satellite-based GPS technology and feed sensitive personal data into centralized government databases. "Good designs don't require you to gather people's location information and store that," Singh Guliani said.

She urged governments to set rules addressing both privacy and efficacy so that surveillance tools don't interfere with more conventional public health methods.

Utah, North Dakota and South Dakota were the first U.S. states to launch voluntary phone apps that enable public health departments to track the location and connections of people who test positive for the coronavirus. But governors haven't had much luck getting the widespread participation needed for them to work effectively.

Continued on Page 4

Vaccine encouraging

More testing needed

WASHINGTON, May 19, (AP): An experimental vaccine against the coronavirus showed encouraging results in very early testing, triggering hopes for immune responses in eight healthy, middle-aged volunteers, its maker has announced.

Study volunteers given either a low or medium dose of the vaccine by Cambridge, Massachusetts-based Moderna Inc. had antibodies similar to those seen in people who have recovered from COVID-19.

In the next phase of the study, led by the U.S. National Institutes of Health, researchers will try to determine which dose is best for a definitive experiment that they aim to start in July.

In all, 45 people have received one or two shots of the vaccine, which was being tested at three different doses. The kind of detailed antibody results needed to assess responses are only available on eight volunteers so far.

The vaccine seems safe, the company said, but much more extensive testing is needed to see if it remains so. A high dose version is being dropped after spurring some short-term side effects.

The results have not been published and are only from the first of three stages of testing that vaccines and drugs normally undergo. U.S. government officials have launched a project called "Operation Warp Speed" to develop a vaccine and hopefully have 300 million doses by January.

Worldwide, about a dozen vaccine candidates are in the first stages of testing or nearing it. Health officials have said that if all goes well, studies of a potential vaccine might wrap up by very late this year or early next year.

More than 4.7 million infections and 315,000 deaths from the coronavirus have been confirmed worldwide since it emerged in China late last year. There are no specific approved treatments, although several are being used on an emergency basis after showing some promise in preliminary testing.

PORTS PARALYZED ... FOOD SECURITY THREATENED

1,073 cases on lockdown-9

Mol warns on curfew permits

KUWAIT CITY, May 19, (Agencies): The Ministry of Health of Kuwait announced Tuesday that the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) has claimed the lives of three people in the past 24 hours, raising the death toll up to 121.

In his daily coronavirus update, the Health Ministry Spokesperson Dr. Abdullah Al-Sanad stated that 1,073 people have tested positive for the highly contagious virus today, increasing the overall number of infections in the country to 16,764.

He estimated the overall number of active cases at 11,962, including 179 patients who are receiving care in the intensive care units.

Earlier, Health Minister Sheikh Dr. Basel Al-Sabah announced the recovery of 342 COVID-19 patients, bringing the total to 4,681 recoveries.

Kuwait ports paralyzed

The total lockdown, which was implemented in Kuwait from May 10, has completely paralyzed the country's ports as a result of companies and individuals not being granted security permits to allow the release of their goods, which are accumulating beyond the ports' capacity to accommodate, reports Al-Qabas daily quoting informed sources.

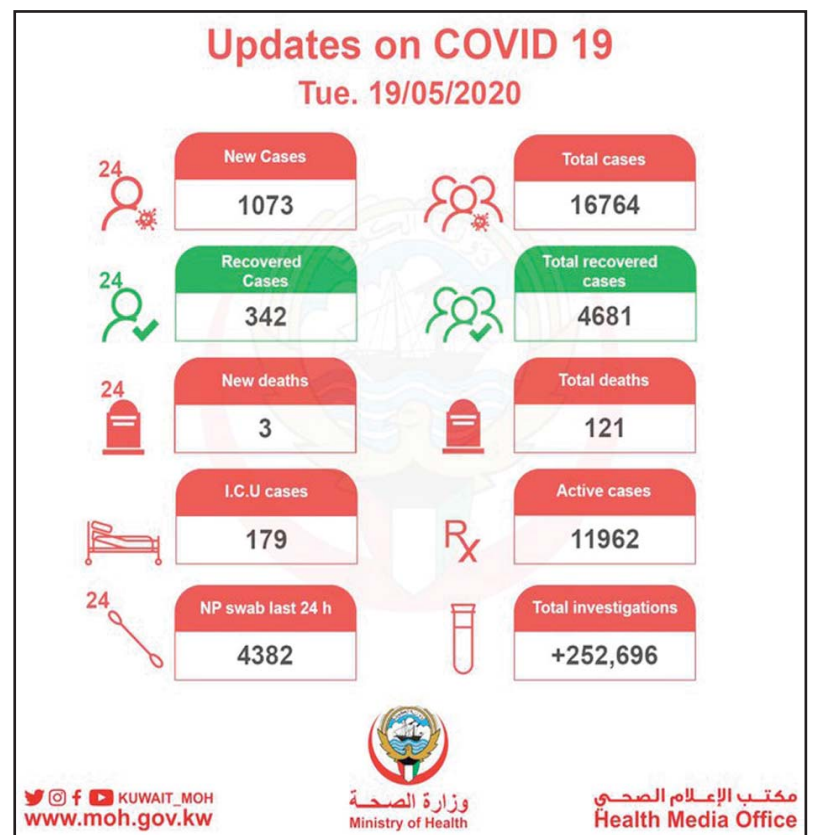
They rang the bells of danger, warning that continuation of this situation will lead to a greater crisis and cause shortage of both food and medicine stocks, unless the concerned agencies are aware of the seriousness of the situation and take necessary action.

The sources explained that thousand tons of commodities are stacked in the warehouses and container yards in Shuwaikh and Shuiba ports. They are no longer capable of receiving incoming ships due to the accumulation of goods.

Continuation of this situation may endanger import of food and frozen meat, and consequently thousands of importers and consumers will be affected.

Security permits for shipping agencies, customs clearance companies and individuals have not been issued since the implementation of the total lockdown. This prevents them from receiving imported goods and commodities, as thousand tons of them are accumulated in the container yards and warehouses.

The sources said, "About 90 percent of the goods and commodities in the country are imported. The absorptive capacity of the ports has been exhausted, as 26 warehouses in Shuwaikh Port as well as the container yards in Shuiba



are full to the maximum capacity."

They indicated that truck drivers are currently unable to load the goods, because some checkpoints of Ministry of Interior have stopped them due to lack of security permits.

The sources revealed that Kuwait Ports Authority's inability to receive ships and vessels currently would expose Kuwait to pay fines up to \$50,000 for keeping them in waiting areas or returning those ships to the regional ports, thereby exposing companies and individuals to face huge losses.

Mol warns on curfew permits

Persons with curfew permits to go see a doctor should register precise information of their destinations in order to allow them further permits and thus avoid legal consequences, Ministry of Interior said Monday.

A ministry statement said persons wishing to see doctor in hospitals or clinics could obtain a curfew permit through: <https://curfew.paci.gov.kw>.

The person should show the permit for employee at the hospital or clinic who would verify information in the permit, it said, a step that would enable this person to obtain another permit in future if needed.

If the location mentioned in the

permit does not match the actual destination, it said, the person would be banned from future permits and be questioned.

Kuwait Government imposed the curfew on May 10-30 with the aim of curbing spread of coronavirus.

Security arrest two girls

Kuwait security forces arrested two girls for breaking the curfew and would face legal charges, Ministry of Interior said Monday.

A video was posted on social media showing the two girls bragging for violating the curfew and that they were above the law, a MoI statement said.

Security forces investigated the video and arrested the girls - an Arab and a Kuwaiti citizen - who were referred to questioning ahead of being charged, it added.

The security authorities will take all legal actions against any person violating the curfew, said the ministry.

MoH sets mask supply criteria

The Kuwaiti Ministry of Health set out new ineluctable technical conditions and criteria for medical mask supplies.

Continued on Page 4

Billionaire Saudi bank tycoon dead at 79

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia, May 19, (AP): Billionaire Saudi businessman Saleh Abdullah Kamel, who founded the banking and real estate conglomerate Dallah Albaraka Group, has died, according to relatives quoted in the kingdom's media. He was 79.

People close to Kamel told The Associated Press he died at the Dr. Samir Abbas Hospital in the city of Jeddah, where he was taken after suffering a heart attack early on Tuesday.

Kamel's business empire grew from its humble beginnings in the late 1960s - at the same time that the kingdom was using its oil wealth to rapidly develop and in need of homegrown companies to build roads, highways and cities.

Over the years, the business expanded to tens of thousands of employees and today includes subsidiaries and stakes in a

range of businesses, such as the operation and maintenance of airports and roads, tourism, trade, trucking and transportation, telecommunications, media, agriculture, poultry and health care.

Kamel's son and the CEO of Dallah Albaraka Group, Abdullah Kamel, was quoted in the state-linked Okaz newspaper that he oversees as saying that funeral prayers will be held Tuesday afternoon in Makkah's Grand Mosque, which has been closed to visitors amid the coronavirus pandemic.

The fact that his funeral prayers are being permitted at the mosque, which is home to Islam's holiest site, reflects Kamel's prominence and stature in Saudi Arabia.

Saudi-owned Al-Arabiya TV network said Kamel, who was born in Makkah

but based in Jeddah, was instrumental in helping build many of the kingdom's ports and major projects.

He served on numerous boards and was the chairman of the General Council for Islamic Banks and the Jiddah Chamber of Commerce. He once owned a significant stake in Saudi broadcaster MBC, which owns and operates Al-Arabiya.

Al-Arabiya dubbed him "the father of contemporary Islamic finance".

His life, however, was not without controversy. Following the 9/11 attacks, he and other prominent Saudi businessmen and princes were sued on charges of financing the attacks. The lawsuits were dismissed by the U.S. District Court of New York in 2005.

Continued on Page 4

Continued on Page 4