

## International

# UAE opens drive-through coronavirus 'testing site'

## Couple to run Dubai balcony marathon to beat virus blues

**DUBAI:** The United Arab Emirates said it has launched a drive-through coronavirus testing facility as part of the Gulf state's efforts to fight the disease. The facility, inaugurated by Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed, will provide screenings within five minutes, using state-of-the-art equipment and a medical team, the Abu Dhabi government's media office said.

"A new drive-through testing facility for COVID-19 has launched ... to offer safe testing procedures," the office said Saturday on Twitter. According to official state news agency WAM, the facility can serve 600 people a day, with priority given to senior citizens, pregnant women and those with chronic illnesses. The media office said people should book an appointment in advance. Tests "for the wider community for reassurance only" would cost 370 dirhams (\$100), according to government advice on Twitter.

The UAE, which on Sunday had 570 officially declared COVID-19 cases, including three deaths, has imposed restrictions on night movements and taken steps to sanitize outdoor areas and public transport. The Gulf state has halted passenger

flights, closed its borders to foreigners and asked people to go outdoors only if necessary. UAE Attorney General Hamad Saif Al-Shamsi has issued a list of fines ranging from \$272 to \$13,600 for those violating regulations imposed to contain the virus.

### Dubai balcony marathon

In another development, a South African couple are to run a marathon on their Dubai balcony to be streamed online as an example of how to beat the coronavirus blues under lockdown. Collin Allin, 41, and wife Hilda aim to cover the 42.2-kilometre (26-mile) distance on their 19-metre (yard) long balcony from 6:00 am on Saturday, a challenge they expect to take between seven and eight hours. "This is about giving people something else to think about," he told AFP. "It's about getting people to connect, as everyone is worried about the impact of coronavirus."

Their 10-year-old daughter Geena will be in charge of providing her parents with water and snacks as well as music to drive the runners. The United Arab Emirates, of which Dubai is a member, has imposed a Thursday to Sunday nighttime

“For the wider community for reassurance only”

## At standstill over virus, Damascus dreads new foe

**DAMASCUS:** On a deserted street in the old city of Damascus, the new coronavirus has forced salesmen like Ahmad to close up shop indefinitely for the first time in Syria's war. "We've lived through some tough times during the war," says the 59-year-old, sitting on a chair on the pavement outside his textiles shop. But "never in my life have I seen the markets and shops close for days on end like now". All around him, businesses have pulled down their metal blinds or covered up their stands.

The scene is the same across much of the Syrian capital, with squares and markets once thronging with people even during the war now almost entirely empty. In the century-old covered bazaar of Hamidiya, workers in orange jumpsuits and face masks spray down wooden doors bolted shut with padlocks. Five cases of COVID-19 have been reported in the country since Sunday, and the authorities have ordered all non-essential businesses closed.

Ahmad this week called in his employees to give them their monthly wages and ask them all to go home. The shopkeeper says he's never known any-

thing like it. Even as rockets rained down during the conflict, the shops would not remain shut for long, he says. "I don't know how we're going to live without work," lamented the tradesman, who supports a family of four including himself.

Eighty percent of Syrians already live under the poverty line, according to the United Nations. Syria's conflict has killed more than 380,000 people and displaced millions from their homes since starting in 2011 with anti-government protests. It has also ravaged the economy and laid waste to much of the country's infrastructure, including the health sector.

### 'War of a different kind'

Even with just a handful of cases so far, Damascus has been increasingly taking precautions across the 70 percent of Syria that it controls. It has closed the border with Lebanon, issued the first night-time curfew ever in the conflict, and suspended transport between provinces. Schools and universities have closed, as have parks, restaurants, coffee shops and other non-essential businesses.

"At the end of 2011, I felt we were heading into the unknown," Ahmad says. The guns largely fell silent around Damascus in 2018, after government forces expelled rebels and jihadists from its edges. But today, "we might be heading into a war of a different kind," Ahmad says, against a "hidden enemy". In another neighborhood, the city's world-renowned Omayyad Mosque has for the first time in years

who breached his mandatory quarantine period, the latest example of the city-state's strict enforcement of social distancing measures. The 53-year-old man had been ordered to stay at home for 14 days after returning to Singapore from neighboring Indonesia, a rule he then broke by making a further trip over the border. Singapore, which has imposed tough measures to slow the spread of the virus - including the threat of six months in jail for people who intentionally stand close to someone else - reported its third COVID-19 death on Sunday.

### Australia limits gatherings

Gatherings were restricted to just two people in Australia from yesterday - down from the current limit of 10 - and playgrounds, outdoor gyms and skateparks will be closed across the country. Prime Minister Scott Morrison said all over-70s as well as indigenous people over 50, who are more susceptible to diseases, are now being strongly advised to self-isolate at home. This came as hundreds of cruise ship passengers were due to board flights for Germany after spending days stranded at sea off the Western Australian coast in a stand-off with authorities. Australia has recorded almost 4,000 cases of COVID-19, with the death toll reaching 16 on Sunday. Meanwhile New Zealand reported its first novel coronavirus death.

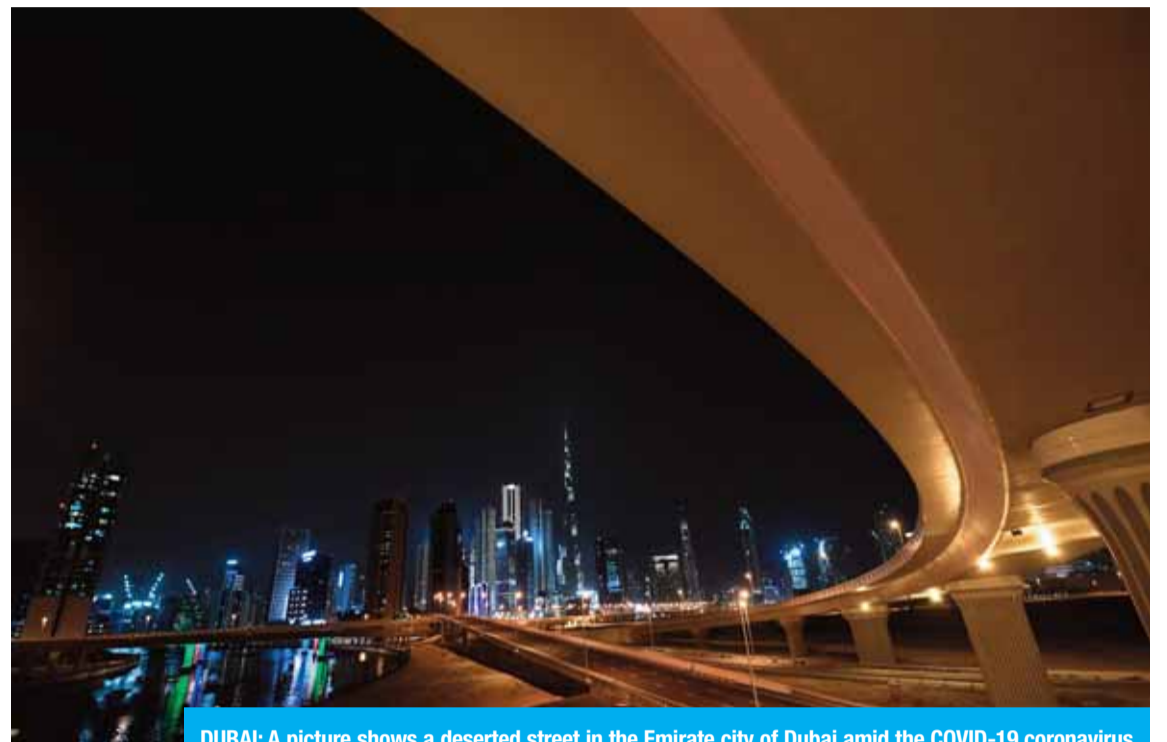
### Australia domestic violence

Australia announced a nearly US\$100 million boost in funding to tackle domestic violence after support services reported a spike in coronavirus-related family abuse. Associations around the world that help victims of domestic violence have

official, who asked to remain anonymous, told AFP that Islamic State members in the prison had revolted.

"Some of them managed to get out into the prison courtyard," the source added. "Security forces are on high alert. International coalition planes are flying over the prison and the region." Coalition military spokesman Colonel Myles Caggins III said: "The Coalition is assisting our Syrian Democratic Forces partners with aerial surveillance as they quell an insurrection" at the prison. But only low-level prisoners were kept at the jail, he added.

The London-based Observatory, which has an extensive network of contacts inside Syria, said at least four people had escaped from the prison. Members of the Islamic State had led the uprising and a search has start-



**DUBAI:** A picture shows a deserted street in the Emirate city of Dubai amid the COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak. —AFP

lockdown to allow for outdoors and public transport sanitation operations. With more than 330 declared cases of the novel coronavirus and two

deaths, it has also been promoting a "stay home" campaign, a message lit up on top of Dubai's Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest tower. —Agencies



**DAMASCUS:** An old market in Syria's capital Damascus stands deserted after measures were taken by the authorities to fight the novel coronavirus pandemic. —AFP

closed its gates. Nearby, shops have also slammed their wooden shutters closed in Hamidiya market. Apart from the men in jumpsuits spraying shutters with watered-down disinfectant, barely a handful of people walk through. Among them, engineering student Mustafa is on his way to a pharmacy to stock up on supplies. Wearing a pale blue surgical mask and plastic gloves, the 24-year-old surveys the empty street. For years, "Damascus bustled on energetically - despite the death, the shelling and the stray bullets," he says. —AFP



**MUMBAI:** Vegetable vendors set up their stalls maintaining social distance in an open field during a government-imposed nationwide lockdown as a preventive measure against the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus in Mumbai yesterday. —AFP

sounded the alarm over fears of an increase in cases, as the stress caused by social isolation exacerbates tensions.

### China reports imported cases

China reported 45 new coronavirus infections on Sunday, all but one of them imported from abroad. That compares with 54 cases the previous day, all imported. After taking draconian steps to bring the virus spread under control domestically, China is now doing the same to prevent imported infections. It announced this week it would drastically reduce the number of international flights into the country and banned foreigners from entering beginning Saturday. —AFP

ed for those who had escaped, it added. SDF spokesman Mustafa Bali, posting on Twitter, said prisoners had broken walls and torn off internal doors. "The situation is still tense inside the prison," he said, adding that reinforcements were on the way to try to regain control.

A year after having declared victory against the Islamic State in Syria, Kurdish forces are still holding around 12,000 IS fighters in the northeast of the country, according to their own figures. They include Syrians, Iraqis and between 2,500 and 3,000 foreign nationals from some 50 countries. While they have called on those countries to take back their nationals, they are also resigned to the prospect of putting them on trial, given the reluctance of several western governments have their nationals repatriated. —AFP

## Japan to ban Europe, China, US travelers as coronavirus spread

**TOKYO:** Japan will step up its efforts to stop the spread of coronavirus by banning the entry of foreign citizens travelling from the United States, China, South Korea and most of Europe, the Asahi newspaper reported yesterday. Non-Japanese citizens who have been in any of these areas in the past two weeks will be barred, the paper said. Tokyo may also ban travel to and from some countries in Southeast Asia and Africa, it said, citing unidentified government sources.

At present, Japan only bans entry of citizens from some parts of South Korea, China as well as numerous European nations, with a request for a two-week self-quarantine for those entering from the United States, China and South Korea. Government officials weren't immediately available to comment. While Japanese nationals would not be affected, the travel ban would come as a surge in the number of infections in Japan stokes fears that Prime Minister Shinzo Abe may shift from considering to declaring a national state of emergency - a step that could pave the way for a lockdown of its capital Tokyo.

"We're in a critical stage" on state of emergency deliberations, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told a news conference on Monday. Any lockdown in Japan would look different to mandatory measures imposed in some parts of Europe and the United States: By law, local authorities are only permitted to issue requests for people to stay home that are not legally binding.

But analysts said such a move would inflict huge damage to an economy already on the cusp of recession due to the widening fallout from the pandemic, which has derailed Tokyo's plans to stage Olympic Games this summer, disrupted supply chains and cooled consumption via event cancellations and shop shut-downs. "I think the possibility of a lockdown of the Tokyo metropolitan area is rising," said Hideo Kumano, chief economist at Dai-ichi Life Research Institute. —Reuters

## Virus fears spark Thai prison riot

**BANGKOK:** Dozens of prisoners broke furniture and torched buildings during a riot in a Thai jail on Sunday sparked by fears of a coronavirus outbreak in the facility. During the violence some convicts escaped from the Buriram prison where more than 2,000 are held, the justice ministry said. Seven have been arrested.

Local media showed footage of black smoke billowing from the prison's multiple blocks in the country's northeast, and a Corrections Department official said drones were deployed to investigate what weapons the prisoners were using. "There was a group of prisoners trying to escape and were creating chaos... which included burning down some facilities inside," said Narat Sawetana, director general of the Corrections Department.

He added later that six prisoners had been injured in the melee by broken glass. More than 1,500 prisoners had to be evacuated before the rioting could be stopped. Justice Minister Somsak Thepsutin confirmed that a group of inmates sentenced to life had started "agitating" other prisoners with rumors of a virus outbreak. "The fact is that none of the prisoners in Buriram were infected-they only started this rumor to find some supporters," the minister said, adding that the cafeteria and visiting areas were among the facilities torched. —AFP

## Asia virus latest: Modi apologizes, Australia limits gatherings

**HONG KONG:** Here are the latest developments from Asia related to the novel coronavirus pandemic:

### Modi asks Indians for forgiveness

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi apologized to citizens for the sweeping 21-day lockdown that has brought the country of 1.3 billion people to a halt, leaving many migrant workers jobless and penniless. "I believe that you will forgive me... I had to take some decisions which have inconvenienced you in various ways, especially my poor brothers and sisters," he said Sunday in a weekly radio address, arguing there was "no other way" to fight the virus.

Meanwhile Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal appealed to rural migrants not to go home after a massive exodus began from cities, with many workers making the long journeys on foot. "Stay where you are. Because there is a risk of corona spreading in such a big crowd," he tweeted. The government ordered all of India's states and territories to seal their borders to reduce the movement of people, and said funds were available within each state to arrange food and shelter for migrants at their places of work.

### Singapore cancels man's passport

Singapore cancelled the passport of a citizen

## Riot, break-out at Syria jail holding Jihadists

**BEIRUT:** Prisoners at a Syrian jail run by Kurdish forces holding suspected Islamic State members rioted and some escaped Sunday, said Kurdish sources and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. A senior member of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) running Ghouran prison in the northeast Syria city of Hassakeh acknowledged that an uprising had taken place. The