

Palestinians try to scrape by in Gaza on World Refugee Day

GAZA: On the United Nations' World Refugee Day yesterday, Marwan Kuwaik, a 70-year-old Palestinian in Gaza, was focused on trying to eke out a living by selling snack food on the street. The June 20 event this year is aimed at reminding the world that everyone, including refugees, can contribute to society, the UN said on its website.

In Gaza, Kuwaik earns about 30 shekels (\$8.50) a day selling lupin beans from his bicycle. He is among 1.4 million Palestinians UN-registered refugees in the impoverished and crowded enclave, whose economy has suffered from years of Israeli and Egyptian blockades. "I support my family, 15 people. I have never stopped my work for 40 years, even during wars, curfews and closures, except when I am sick," Kuwaik said.

Kuwaik's parents were among the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who fled or were forced to leave their homes in what is now Israel during the fighting that surrounded its founding in 1948. He was born two years later in Gaza and lives in the outskirts of its Beach refugee camp. The UN registers as refugees the descendants of those Palestinians displaced more than 70 years ago.

Kuwaik said his family once owned farmland in Lod, a city in Israel. He visited Lod twice in the early 1980s and found a new house of concrete had been built next to his father's old shelter. The new Israeli owners continued to grow olive trees on the farmland as his family long had, he said. "We will return," Kuwaik vowed in his house as he filled small plastic bags with lupin beans. "If we die our sons will rise, and if they die then our grandchildren will do it." Asked about World Refugee Day, he said: "We remain without a solution ... the situation is miserable but we still have hopes." — Reuters



GAZA: Palestinian sand sculptor Rana Ramlawi finishes a new artwork creation commemorating World Refugee Day in Gaza City yesterday, depicting a woman carrying a child and a sack of flour bearing the logo of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) with a child behind holding a jerry can of water, all standing before a map of the world. — AFP

Protesters rally, topple statue...

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gatherings, but comes this year amid a national soul-searching over America's legacy of racial injustice. The United States has been gripped by daily "Black Lives Matter" protests since the May 25 death of George Floyd, a 46-year-old black man killed by a white police officer in Minnesota.

Late on Friday a statue of Confederate general Albert Pike was torn down by demonstrators in the capital and set on fire, in an act labeled a "disgrace" by Trump. "The DC police are not doing their job as they watch a statue be ripped down & burn. These people should be immediately arrested," Trump tweeted.

Earlier, several thousand demonstrators marched across New York's Brooklyn Bridge to Manhattan, chanting the names of black men and women killed by police in recent years. "This year the entire country has had a reckoning," said protester Tabatha Bernard, 38, voicing support for growing calls for Juneteenth to be declared a national holiday. "It's up to us to keep this going until we have change."

Protesters in Atlanta, where a police officer was charged with murder this week for shooting a black man in the back, marched on the Georgia State Capitol. More gathered in Washington outside the Lincoln Memorial and near the White House, while thousands marched in Chicago and danced at festive rallies in South Los Angeles. Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden, who has a solid lead over Trump in the latest polls, said Juneteenth reminded Americans "that our country is capable of the worst violence and injustice but it also has an

WHO warns world in 'new and...

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The health ministry said the jump was caused by "instability" in its reporting system, which delayed previous days' figures for some states. Brazil's death toll now stands at nearly 49,000, and has risen by more than 1,000 each of the past four days — though its curve finally appears to be starting to flatten.

Authorities in Mexico City meanwhile pushed back a planned reopening of the economy from next week to the following, saying the rate of infection was still too high. And Argentina, which is reeling from the economic impact of the health crisis, bought more time to negotiate its \$66 billion debt restructuring with creditors, who agreed to extend the deadline once again, to July 24.

In Europe, researchers in Italy said they had found evidence the virus was present there in December, months before its first confirmed cases and about the same time the disease was first reported in China. Researchers discovered genetic traces of SARS-CoV-2 — as the virus is officially known — in samples of waste water collected in Milan and Turin at the end of last year, and Bologna in January, the ISS institute said. Italy's first confirmed cases were not until February.

Italy was the first European country to be hit by the virus and the first in the world to impose a nationwide lockdown, in early March. ISS, Italy's top health agency, also urged caution after last week seeing "warning signs" of virus transmission following two outbreaks in Rome. Many European countries followed Italy into lockdown, and most have only recently begun reopening.

Facing the biggest recession in EU history, leaders held a virtual summit on the European

incredible capacity to be reborn anew."

In Tulsa — where Trump on Saturday is set to hold his first campaign rally since the coronavirus pandemic began — a Juneteenth celebration was attended by several thousand protesters. "We've seen more unity and more blacks and whites together in the last three weeks than we've ever seen in a Trump rally," civil rights activist Al Sharpton told a press conference.

Trump had originally scheduled his Tulsa appearance for Juneteenth, but was forced to change it amid a public outcry over his provocative choice of date and location. The city's Greenwood district was the site of one of the country's worst racist massacres, in 1921, when as many as 300 black Americans were killed. "We just want the world to know what happened here," said Greenwood store owner Tony Williams, labelling Trump's arrival "disrespectful".

About a mile away, dozens of Trump followers have camped out for several nights ahead of the rally in order to get the best seats. "This is a super important moment for all of us... we're out here supporting Trump," said Stephen Corley, 19. Trump, who is facing a tough re-election battle in November and has adopted a hardline "law and order" stance towards protesters, and First Lady Melania Trump issued a joint statement to mark Juneteenth. "Juneteenth reminds us of both the unimaginable injustice of slavery and the incomparable joy that must have attended emancipation," it said.

At the same time, Trump issued a blunt warning to counter-protesters headed to Tulsa. "Any protesters, anarchists, agitators, looters or lowlifes who are going to Oklahoma please understand, you will not be treated like you have been in New York, Seattle, or Minneapolis," he said. "It will be a much different scene!" Tulsa Mayor G T Bynum declared a curfew in the city amid fears of violence but Trump later announced it had been lifted for "our many supporters" attending the rally. — AFP

Commission's proposal for a 750 billion euro (\$840 billion) rescue fund. However, they fell short of reaching a deal. Opposition is fierce from the "frugal four" — Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark and Austria. But Italy and Spain, hit first and hardest by the pandemic, are crippled by overstretched finances.

After largely bringing the virus under control and easing restrictions, China is now fighting a new cluster linked to a wholesale market in Beijing. Authorities launched a nationwide campaign to inspect food imports, test tens of thousands of people and lock down affected neighborhoods. Chinese officials said genome data suggested the new outbreak in Beijing "came from Europe", but was older than the strain currently spreading there. Zhang Yong of the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) raised the possibility the virus lurked in imported frozen food or in the wholesale market itself, resulting in similarities to older strains.

The United States has the highest death toll by far, at more than 119,000, and the world's largest economy is taking a beating in a year when President Donald Trump seeks re-election. However, top US expert Anthony Fauci said in an interview with AFP he was optimistic America would not impose a new lockdown. He predicted it would instead focus on "trying to better control those areas of the country that seem to be having a surge of cases." Fauci said he was hopeful for a vaccine, calling early trial results "encouraging". Still, Apple said it was closing some stores in US states experiencing a surge in infections.

Normality is returning to cultural and sporting events disrupted by the virus. France said it would reopen cinemas from Monday and stadiums from July 11, though with a 5,000-fan limit. In the country of le grand amour, actors have also started kissing again on film shoots. "No, the kiss is not finished," French Culture Minister Franck Riester declared when asked if social distancing was in danger of killing off love scenes. Actors must however be tested before they resume smooching. — Agencies

Algeria cracks down on activists in bid to break protest movement

ALGIERS: Algeria has intensified a crackdown on an anti-government protest movement, targeting social media users in a bid to stop demonstrations resuming once coronavirus restrictions end. Weekly protests rocked the North African country for more than a year and only stopped in March due to the novel coronavirus outbreak. The "Hirak" protest movement caused the downfall of former president Abdelaziz Bouteflika in April 2019 after 20 years in power. It has continued demanding an overhaul of Algeria's governance system, in place since independence from France in 1962.

Authorities have made about 200 arrests linked to the protests since the country's coronavirus restrictions came into effect three months ago, according to Said Salhi, vice president of the Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights. "The authorities have taken advantage of the lull to arrest the maximum number of activists," he said.

Protesters are being pursued for "crimes of opinion and expression connected to posts on social media, particularly Facebook," he said, with some of their homes searched and mobile phones confiscated. Most of the authorities' actions are based on changes to the penal code that were passed in April amid the health crisis and have been denounced by human rights activists.

Salhi called the moves "an irresponsible attack, verging on provocation, against fundamental

human rights". On Thursday, more than 20 opposition activists were summoned to appear in seven separate hearings, mostly in trials that had been delayed due to the pandemic. Those accused include figures in the protest movement, political activists, journalists and people accused of mocking the regime online.

"The government doesn't believe in change, it refuses to listen to the people," lawyer Mustapha Bouchachi was quoted as saying this week in French-language daily Liberte. "In my opinion, it is making these arrests to break the Hirak," he added. According to detainees' rights association CNLD, 60 prisoners of conscience are currently jailed.

In a sign the government might be nervous about the public mood, several academics rushed to its defense in official media this week, accusing a "neo-Hirak" of being "in the service of a foreign plan". But press freedom group Reporters Without Borders (RSF) has called on the Algerian authorities to "stop using the justice system to muzzle the media".

"The increase in legal proceedings against Algerian journalists is extremely worrying and indicates a blatant deterioration of press freedom in Algeria," RSF director for North Africa, Souhaieb Khayati, said in a statement. Four Algerian journalists were prosecuted or sentenced to prison last week. — AFP

Sleep, Netflix for Malala as...

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Economics degree at Oxford. I don't know what's ahead. For now, it will be Netflix, reading and sleep," she said on her Twitter and Instagram feeds. Congratulations poured in on social media, including from aid charity Oxfam, which said: "Congratulations, you are an inspiration!". Hollywood and Bollywood star Priyanka Chopra Jonas, who has 54 million Instagram followers, said: "Congratulations Malala!! That's amazing."

Yousafzai, now 22, survived being shot in the head by a Taliban gunman in 2012, after she was targeted for her campaign against efforts by the Taliban to deny women education. She had become known as an 11-year-old writing a blog under a pen

name for the BBC about living under the rule of the Pakistani Taliban. A gunman arrived at her school, asking for her by name. He opened fire on her and two classmates on a bus.

She was airlifted to a hospital first in Pakistan and then to an intensive care unit in England for multiple operations. After recovering, Yousafzai attended school in England, before winning the place at Oxford. At the age of 17, in 2014, Yousafzai became the youngest recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize for her education advocacy. Through her Malala Fund, she has also become a global symbol of the resilience of women in the face of repression.

"Like many of you, the pandemic has changed a lot about my final year of university," she wrote in a post to graduates in the Malala Fund's digital newsletter for young women, Assembly, speaking about how her brothers kept interrupting her studies. "It's hard not to think about all the moments we're missing. But we didn't miss out on the most important thing: Our education." — Reuters

Modi downplays clash; China hands...

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personnel," Zhao said. The Indian army did not comment on the release, which according to the source took place on Thursday evening, instead referring to a government statement that said all of its soldiers were accounted for.

India has said the Chinese side also suffered casualties in the clash, but China has not disclosed any. Military officials have since held talks, but there is no sign of a breakthrough. "The situation remains as it was, there is no disengagement, but there is also no further buildup of forces," said a second Indian government source, who is aware of the ground situation. The official said at least 76 Indian troops were wounded during the clash, and had been hospitalized. "No one is critical as of now," he said.

Funerals for the Indian soldiers, many attended by thousands of people, have become rallying

points for calls to boycott China. Chinese flags and posters of China's President Xi Jinping have been burned in several cities. The Indian Premier League, the world's wealthiest cricket tournament, said its governing council would meet next week to "review" sponsorship deals after "the border skirmish that resulted in the martyrdom of our brave" soldiers. The league's title sponsor is Chinese telephone maker Vivo.

The United States offered condolences to India on Friday. "We extend our deepest condolences to the people of India for the lives lost as a result of the recent confrontation with China," US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a message posted on Twitter. "We will remember the soldiers' families, loved ones, and communities as they grieve."

Having actively sought greater economic engagement with China, Modi is compelled to review the state of those ties, just at a time when Sino-US relations have also deteriorated. As a non-aligned nation, India has always sought to balance the influence of super-powers. But in the past two decades, New Delhi has built closer political and defense ties with Washington, and the United States has become one of India's top arms suppliers. — Agencies