بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

Headlines:

- **America: 38.6 Million Filed for Unemployment during the Pandemic—Greater than the Combined Population of 21 States**
- **Saudi Arabia Urges People to Offer Eid Prayer at Home**
- **Chinese FM Blasts US Warning on HK National Security Law**

Details:

America: 38.6 Million Filed for Unemployment during the Pandemic—Greater than the Combined Population of 21 States

Another 2.4 million Americans filed for unemployment insurance last week even as states across the US began opening up for business again, betting that the coronavirus pandemic is now under control. The latest figures from the Department of Labor mean close to 39 million Americans have lost their jobs in just nine weeks. The rate of weekly losses has slowed sharply from its peak of 6.6m at the start of April but remains at levels unseen since the 1930s Great Depression. This week the treasury secretary, Steven Mnuchin, said he expects unemployment to continue to rise as the pandemic takes its toll, but warned of "permanent damage" to the economy if the lockdowns are prolonged. The weekly jobless claims are seen as a proxy for layoffs, but they do not necessarily give the most accurate picture of the unemployment situation. A claim is an application for unemployment benefits, and not every person who is laid off immediately applies for benefits. The weekly unemployment claims are also still being affected by a backlog collapse of claims that overwhelmed many state systems. The official unemployment rate is now 14.7%, the worst since records began. A decade's worth of job gains have been wiped out, and most economists believe the real figure is higher and expect unemployment to rise to well above 20% in the coming months. [Source: Forbes; The Guardian]

The soaring unemployment rate combined with long queues at food banks threatens to tear the social fabric of American society. Covid-19 is laying the seeds for mass civil disobedience, and the probability of a protracted governance crisis increases by the day. The crisis may precipitate a new social contract between the political establishment and the governed.

Saudi Arabia Urges People to Offer Eid Prayer at Home

Saudi Arabia has called on people to offer the Eid Al Fitr prayer at home instead of mosques, in light of the current Covid-19 pandemic, Saudi Gazette has reported. Saudi Arabia's Grand Mufti and head of the Council of Senior Scholars and the Department of Scientific Research and Ifta Sheikh Abdul Aziz Al Asheikh said that it is permissible to offer Eid prayer at home in exceptional situations likened to the current outbreak. Saudi Arabia has also declared a 24-hour curfew across all cities and regions in the kingdom from Saturday, May 23 until the end of Wednesday, May 27. As per a directive issued on May 7, gatherings of more than four people are prohibited and those who flout this rule will be subject to disciplinary action, reported Saudi Press Agency, while attributing this to an official source within the kingdom's Ministry of Interior. Last week, the ministry said that people who break the quarantine will be fined SAR200,000 ($53,255) and/or imprisoned for two years.

Also, anyone who deliberately spreads the virus will be fined SAR500,000 and/or imprisoned for five years. The ministry called on the people to observe social distancing and to adhere to the instructions related to health safety requirements to prevent the spread of the Covid-19 virus. [Source: Gulf Business]

There is no reason to prohibit Eid prayers. Had the Saudi authorities separated the healthy from the vulnerable, economic activity, and congregational prayers like Jumma and Eid could have continued.

Chinese FM Blasts US Warning on HK National Security Law

A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson refuted US President Donald Trump's response to the Chinese central government's proposed national security law for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, mentioning the word "unswervingly" three times to show China's determination to safeguard national sovereignty and interests. Reuters reported Trump warned that Washington would react "very strongly" against any attempt to gain more control over Hong Kong. The report said the US State Department also warned China, saying a high-degree of autonomy and respect for human rights were keys to preserving "the territory's special status in US law," which has helped it maintain its position as a world financial center. In response to the Trump administration's reaction, Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian said on Friday's routine press conference that the Chinese government will safeguard national sovereignty, security and development interests unswervingly, implement the principle of "one country, two systems" unswervingly and oppose any outside interference in Hong Kong affairs unswervingly. National security is the basic premise for the survival and development of a country. No country in the world allows secessionist or other activities that endanger its national security to be carried out on its territory, Zhao said. Hong Kong is a special administrative region of China. The issue of national security legislation in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region is purely China's internal affairs, and no foreign country has the right to interfere, Zhao noted. A draft decision on establishing and improving the legal system and enforcement mechanisms for the HKSAR to safeguard national security was submitted to the third session of the 13th National People's Congress (NPC) for deliberation on Friday. Zhao also responded to the Trump administration's report of the US Strategic Approach to China consistent with the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019, in which the report said more than 40 years later, it has become evident that since the US and China established diplomatic relations in 1979, US policy toward China was largely premised on a hope that deepening engagement would spur fundamental economic and political opening in China and lead to its emergence as a constructive and responsible global stakeholder with a more open society. [Source: Global Times]

Ever since the Treaty of NanKing in 1842, the West has made Chinese sovereignty over Hong Kong a purview for Western interference. Old European powers (Britain and France) followed by America routinely tell China how to rule Hong Kong. Unless, the Chinese government ends the one China two systems policy over the port, the West will continue to humiliate China.