

78 new coronavirus cases as Jleeb, Mahboula cordoned off

Saudi imposes 24-hour curfew • Gulf states urged to free workers, activists

By B Izzak and Agencies

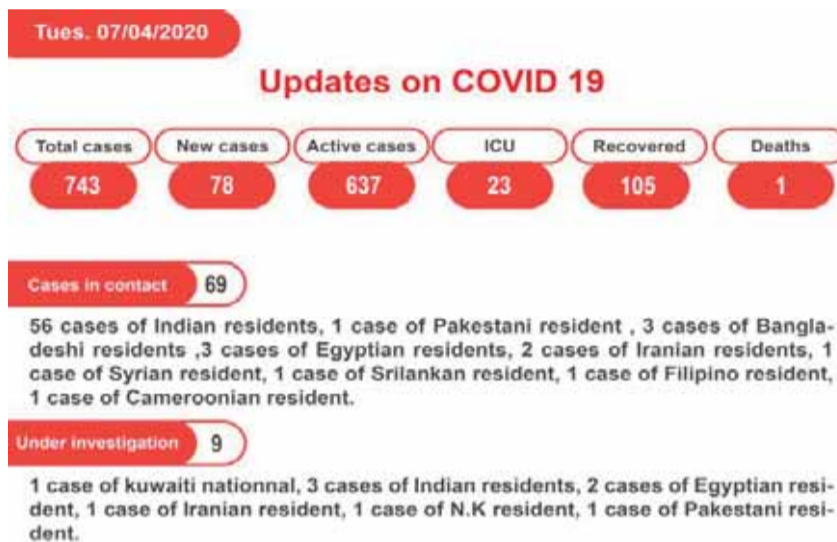
KUWAIT: The ministry of health reported 78 new coronavirus cases yesterday, raising the total number to 743 cases and one death. Of the new cases, 77 are expats, 59 of whom are Indians and the rest belonging to several nationalities. Of the 637 cases receiving treatment, 23 are in intensive care, six in critical condition. The ministry said two cases had recovered, one a 72-year-old Kuwaiti man and the other a two-year-old expat boy, raising the total number of recoveries to 105.

MP Omar Al-Tabtabaei said yesterday that he and a group of lawmakers have submitted a draft law to increase penalties on "traffickers in persons" in order to fight visa traders in the country, blamed for recruiting thousands of expat workers for money. The lawmaker said the main idea of the legislation is to upgrade the penalty from a misdemeanor to a felony, which is accompanied by proposing tougher punishments.

Tabtabaei said expatriate laborers are not to blame for this grave violation, because they were recruited to the country and abandoned without jobs in exchange of illegal fees, which are taken every year. He said MPs had in the past submitted scores of proposals to rectify the imbalance in the demographic structure, which is tilted in favor of expatriates who make up some 70 percent of the country's nearly five million people.

The lawmaker said that it is unacceptable that the number of expats reaches this high level because they overburden services and food commodities in the country, especially in times of crises. He said Kuwait is committed by its constitution to offer all services to its citizens as well as residents, but this is an appropriate time to resolve this decades-old problem. Tabtabaei called on the government and the Assembly to swiftly debate and approve the legislation so as to start implementing it soon.

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Health Media Office

School closures have little impact on virus control

LONDON: School closures do not tend to help contain the spread of infections during outbreaks of disease such as COVID-19, but will have a big impact on how societies restart after lockdown, scientists said on Monday. Data on the effects of school closures on COVID-19 are limited as the pandemic is still under way, but researchers at University College London said evidence from flu epidemics and outbreaks caused by other coronaviruses suggests their impact on the spread of the disease will be small.

"We know from previous studies that school closures are likely to have the greatest effect if the virus has low transmissibility and attack rates are higher in children. This is the opposite of COVID-19," said Russell Viner, an expert at UCL's Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health who co-led the research. "Policymakers need to be aware of the equivocal evidence when considering school closures for COVID-19 given the profound and long lasting effect they will have on children - particularly the most disadvantaged," he said.

Millions of children around the world have been affected by school closures as governments introduced social distancing and lockdown measures to try to slow the COVID-19 pandemic caused by the new SARS-COV2 coronavirus. Viner's research, published late on Monday in The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health, said school closures have little impact on virus control.

Continued on Page 16

British PM fights virus in ICU as global toll soars

LONDON: Britain's prime minister was battling the coronavirus in intensive care yesterday, the highest-profile case in the pandemic as the United States and Europe saw their death tolls reach new milestones. Boris Johnson's fight against the disease

underscored the indiscriminate nature of COVID-19, which has restricted freedoms for some four billion people, wrecked the global economy and upended society.

Johnson spent the night in intensive care after being admitted with a deteriorating case of coronavirus, prompting serious concerns yesterday about his health and the government's response to a still-escalating outbreak. Johnson asked Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab to deputize for him shortly before he was moved to the intensive care unit of a London hospital on Monday evening.

Continued on Page 16



Boris Johnson



Protecting our readers

We at Kuwait Times are keen to protect the health and safety of our readers, our employees and our beloved Kuwait. To that end, and in line with Ministry of Health guidelines, we are halting the print edition of the newspaper to avoid readers' contact with any unnecessary surfaces that might get contaminated on the way to you while maintaining your source of up to date news. The suspension of the print edition will begin Friday, April 10 until further notice.

Kuwait Times is committed to providing updated, in-depth reporting on all news and information our readers need to know in these challenging times and will continue to publish via all our digital channels. Stay home, stay safe and stay informed with Kuwait Times.

Local

Kuwait employers have no right to fire employees due to coronavirus: Lawyer

Papers giving up workers' financial rights legally void

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Many workers have lost their jobs since the country went on a coronavirus lockdown. As Kuwait imposed a partial curfew and closed its borders, airports and businesses and suspended schools, many people faced unfair actions. Kuwait Times spoke to Mohammad Al-Jasem, lawyer and Interpol-accredited expert in international law enforcement cooperation, to learn about the legal issues faced by workers.

Many employers have terminated their workers due to the current situation. But Jasem said an employer does not have the right to fire his employees according to article 41 of the labor law, where the law affirms that the employer cannot terminate the services of a worker without notice, or else he must offer compensation in recognition of his loss.

"Unless the worker has committed a mistake that resulted in a large loss for the employer or violated the contract, the employer cannot just fire the worker. If it was proven that the employer terminated the worker for no obvious reason, the employee shall be entitled to end-of-service benefits and compensation for the material and moral damages suffered," he added.

Regarding some cases where some employees were forced to sign a paper giving up their financial rights, Jasem said: "The employer does not have the right to do so and it is legally void. In many labor cases, this has not been taken into account, and the verdict was in favor of the employee despite the existence of such a paper. Likewise, the employer does not have the right to cut or suspend salaries, and is obliged to pay wages in full throughout the period of suspension as long as the employer wishes to continue working with the employee, according to article 61 of the labor law."

Teachers' salaries
Kuwait Times has received many complaints from teachers, and Jasem replied to all inquiries and related issues. The ministry of education has guaranteed the salaries of private and government school teachers, but what about teachers and professors in nurseries and universities? Jasem explained that the law and decisions also apply to them. "Owners are obligated to pay their employees full wages throughout the period of suspension. But the owners of these activities can



Legal steps to file complaint

end the service of the employees who have not completed the trial period by a formal notice," he said.

About complaints from teachers regarding deduction of their salaries due to being outside the country, he said that there are two aspects to this case. "First, if the teacher was outside the country during a vacation but the conditions prevented them from returning for a reason outside their control, such as the closure of airports, this action is considered illegal and they are entitled to claim what was deducted from their dues. In the second case, if the absence was intentional and the salary was deducted based on proven evidence presented to the

school, then the teacher has no right to claim the rest of their salary due to their absence without an excuse, due to the fact that they were able to return before the occurrence of the circumstance," Jasem said.

"In normal circumstances, according to the labor law, the school does not have the right to compel teachers to work during their annual vacation, but in these exceptional circumstances, refer to the decisions of the ministry of education and the Council of Ministers with regards to canceling the summer vacation," he added.

Jasem explained the legal steps in case of filing a complaint. "The legal procedures start with submitting a complaint of entitlement at the ministry of social affairs regarding late salaries, end of service, request to transfer sponsorship, unpaid deductions, etc. The complaint will be registered with a case number, and both the worker and employer will be notified about the date of the session and the name of the researcher. An investigation will then be carried out by a specialist researcher at the ministry. In the event of the expiry of the residency, the worker is given a three-month extension until the complaint is resolved, and if the worker is in the right, their entitlements will be given to them and they will be transferred to another sponsor. After that, the complaint will be transferred to the labor court to calculate their dues," he explained.



Lawyer Mohammad Al-Jasem

Tenants' rights

A number of stores are closed due to the lockdown, so Kuwait Times asked Jasem about tenants' legal rights. He said Kuwaiti law does not give the tenant of a shop or any commercial activity the right to be exempted from the rent in full, but the law allows him to request the termination of the contract or the reduction of the rent (unless the contract stipulates otherwise), in accordance with the provision of article 581 of the Kuwait civil law.

In the event that the landlord files an eviction lawsuit, the law gives the judge the discretionary power to seek an excuse from the tenant for delaying the payment of rent, and the tenant has the right to request the termination of the contract or the reduction of the rent, based on the failure to use the rented place completely and circumstances outside his will. "Under these circumstances, it is better to agree on temporary and exceptional agreements such as deferring the rent amount or paying in installments until this crisis is resolved, as the courts are currently closed and procedures may take a long time," he advised.

Jasem told Kuwait Times that he has started receiving many complaints from employees against their employers, some of whom compel the employee to sign on vacations with no salary during the suspension period, as well as some business owners who reduced or delayed the payment of salaries due to the current crisis, and in some cases workers have been fired. "We have also received complaints regarding contractual obligations between individuals, such as rent for private housing as well as commercial activities. Many tenants were unable to pay the rent due to the current conditions on the one hand and the owners' insistence on their rights on the other," he said.

Pandemic Diaries

The middle miles



By Jamie Etheridge

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On Monday night the government announced an extension of the public holiday until April 23, an extension of the partial curfew by two hours, now from 5 pm to 6 am, and the lockdown of two densely populated areas - Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and Mahboula. The news left many people terrified, and it's still unclear how the lockdowns will work. Residents in those areas are understandably worried about what the next two weeks will hold.

All of us are looking for a light at the end of the tunnel. When this started in the last week of February with the first cases of COVID-19 and the government's calls to #stayathome, none of us could have imagined how disruptive it would be. None of us likely considered the weeks and weeks of staying at home and nightly curfews and lockdowns and the terrifying rise in the daily tally counts of infected cases.

Some, possibly good, news is emerging from Europe that may point the way forward. On Monday, Italy reported the lowest number of new infections since the outbreak started there. Germany and Spain are reporting declines in new cases too and France is finally starting to see a leveling off. Austria and Denmark are now looking at ways to stagger the reopening of public life after the next two weeks.

Fears of resurgence, however, along with continued social distancing efforts remain. The slow emergence from the lockdown continues to limit the return to normalcy in Wuhan, China, the first city to shut down due to the coronavirus.

We are still in the midst of the pandemic and the end may be something we can begin to anticipate, but it is not here yet. If this were a marathon, we are now in the middle miles, the long lonely hard ones where the finish line is still too far out and the miles run so far have left us hurting, hungry and exhausted. The marathon is the middle miles and there is nothing to do but keep going, stay strong mentally, stay at home and get through this the best way we can.

Coronavirus in Kuwait: What we know so far

KUWAIT: Kuwait has so far recorded 743 cases infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), in addition to one death. With the exception of 23 cases in intensive care, all infected cases are in stable condition and are recovering in quarantined locations designated by the government for this purpose, while 911 have been discharged from quarantine after exhibiting no symptoms during their 14-day quarantine period, the Ministry of Health confirmed. Meanwhile, 105 people have recovered completely after previously being infected with the virus, the ministry said. There are 637 people receiving treatment and 2,474 quarantined as of yesterday. Kuwait is taking measures to test Kuwaitis coming from infected areas for potential infection, as it has already tested thousands of people. Meanwhile, Kuwait requires all expatriates who arrived from travel on March 1 and beyond to visit Kuwait International Fairground where the Ministry of Health has set up a center at Hall 6 to test people for possible infection.

Curfew

Kuwait enforced a country-wide curfew from 5:00 pm to 6:00 am until further notice. The government also locked down Mahboula and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh in a bid to contain the spread of the virus and enable health workers to test inhabitants. Earlier, the government decided to close all shopping malls, beauty salons and barber shops as part of its measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. The government also allowed restaurants to host a maximum of five people at a time and in case there are lines, the distance must be at least one meter between people.

Precautions

All arrivals to Kuwait from all countries are to be placed under compulsory institutional quarantine for 14 days, during which the person is monitored, and prescribed health procedures are applied, the health ministry said. Kuwait halted all commercial flights until further notice. Authorities also announced a public holiday in the country from March 12 to April 23, with work resuming on April 26, while entities providing vital services will remain open. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education has suspended classes for March at all public and private schools (for both students and teaching staffs); first from March 1 to March 12, and later extended it until March 29, before eventually suspending schools until August for grade 12 and October for other stages.

Kuwait suspended issuing entry permits and visas unless those issued through diplomatic missions. State departments have been on high alert to take precautions against the potential spread of the virus. The Ministry of Commerce and Industry has taken measures to make sure that facial masks, hand sanitizers and other goods remain accessible to the public.

Amnesty

The Interior Ministry issued an amnesty allowing residency violators to leave the country between April 1 and April 30 without paying any fines or airfare with a chance to return to Kuwait later. The amnesty was issued in view of the circumstances the country is currently going through and as part of the precautionary measures taken to fight the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). Individuals desiring to procure valid residencies in Kuwait and

are willing to pay the fines without being subjected to investigations will be allowed to pay the fines and legalize their status if they meet the required conditions. Special centers in Farwaniya were allocated to accommodate violators who finalize their papers pending departure. Male violators are received at Al-Muthanna primary school for boys, Farwaniya, block 1, street 122, while female violators are received at Farwaniya primary school for girls in Farwaniya, block 1, street 76. Violators are received from 8 am till 2 pm according to the following dates and nationalities: Philippines (April 1-5, 2020), Egypt (April 6-10), India (April 11-15), Bangladesh (April 16-20), Sri Lanka (April 21-25), other nationalities (April 26-30, 2020). The Interior Ministry later opened two new locations in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh to receive residency violators from all nationalities: Female violators are received at Roufayda Al-Aslamaya School - Block 4 - Street 200, while male violators are received at Naem bin Masod School - Block 4 - Street 250.

Hotlines

- The Ministry of Health has set the following hotlines to receive inquiries about the coronavirus 24/7: 24970967 - 96049698 - 99048619.
- The Education Ministry set the following hotlines to receive inquiries on school closures related to the anti-coronavirus measures:

- 24970967 (24/7 hotline)
- 51575591 (Capital Educational Zone)
- 51576117 (Hawally Educational Zone)
- 51576576 (Farwaniya Educational Zone)
- 51577055 (Jahra Educational Zone)
- 51577655 (Ahmadi Educational Zone)
- 51577951 (Mubarak Al-Kabeer Educational Zone)
- 51578171 (Religious Studies Department)
- 51588599 (Private Education Department)
- 51592515 (Services Department)
- 51594544 (Public Relations Department)

Medicine delivery

Kuwait's Ministry of Health (MOH) launched a new medicine delivery service for people in Kuwait, which they can use to order medications to be delivered during curfew hours. The medications will be delivered within 72 hours after the order is submitted. To place an order, patients should send a WhatsApp to the numbers for the hospitals and medical centers as listed below. The patient should include their name, Civil ID number, hospital or clinic file number, mobile phone number and the medicine needed to the following numbers:

- Amiri Hospital: 50880699
- Mubarak Al-Kabeer Hospital: 50880755
- Farwaniya Hospital: 50880852
- Adan Hospital: 50880908
- Jahra Hospital: 50881066
- Sabah Hospital: 97632660
- Jaber Hospital: 96992079
- Ibn Sina Hospital: 99613948
- Chest Hospital: 99258749
- Razi Hospital: 97633487
- Kuwait Cancer Control Center: 96735242
- Psychiatric Hospital: 97350113
- Physiotherapy Hospital: 99824037
- Maternity Hospital: 98559531
- As'ad Al-Hamad Dermatology Center: 98514508
- Zain Hospital: 97552031
- NBK Hospital: 96931761
- Al-Rashed Allergy Hospital: 94162470
- Infectious Diseases Hospital: 96989164
- Palliative Care Hospital: 94024786
- Sabah Al-Ahmad Urology Center: 90952469
- KFH Addiction Treatment Center: 94169363

In My View

When we behave



By Abdellatif Sharaa

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I was calling some of my friends Monday evening to see how they were doing. A friend in Mahboula told me the area was sealed off some time before the official announcement was made by the Council of Ministers. The only thing this friend was worried about was not being able to report to work due to the attitude of his employer, who had already hinted something like this may happen. Meanwhile, some companies attempted to move their workers out of the area before the lockdown took effect, but were prevented from doing so, because this will defeat the purpose.

I then called a friend in Farwaniya who told me that almost all baqalas (grocery stores) are empty of certain ethnic foods, as people are rushing to buy supplies. Social media clips showed people carrying bags walking out of Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh, then when a reporter asked why are you leaving, they said their companies ordered them to move to another building across the street just outside the area.

Companies and people are getting panicky - the former for their businesses and the latter for their livelihood - despite assurances from the government. Then when rumors about a curfew were floating around, huge crowds swarmed supermarkets and cooperative societies to stock food items and supplies in unbelievable amounts, then soon enough they discovered a mistake was made, because supplies remained as the government said, except for onions that disappeared from stores for a short period, but that is another story.

It is human nature to overreact and panic when major events occur, despite messages, TV programs and instructions on what to do to stay safe, while at the same time arrangements will be made to let people get their needs in an orderly manner. Authorities have assured people that strategic stocks are enough for at least nine months, if not more.

Lockdowns, partial curfews, total curfews and other strict measures are taken as a result of our behavior and not complying with instructions that reduce the risk of spreading the disease. There was a time when the number of cases were going down, only to surge once again, and almost all new cases were due to being in contact with an infected person who arrived from abroad, despite instructions not to be in close contact with persons suspected of having the virus and remain in home quarantine for a period of two weeks and get tested for the virus, but the numbers proved that this was not followed.

So, that is why difficult and strict measures are being taken so the crisis can be overcome in a shorter period than what it may take if left alone. I will never get tired of saying "STAY HOME" - this is for your safety first and the safety of others, bearing in mind that we are all on the same boat regardless of what class our ticket is.

People's behavior makes sense if you think about it in terms of their goals, needs and motives. - Thomas Mann

Local

Kuwait govt to take legal action against sponsors abusing workers

Kuwait witnesses most critical phase amidst COVID-19: Health Minister

KUWAIT: Kuwait government decided Monday to extend a holiday that was supposed to end this week until April 23 as part of the country's efforts to curb spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), while taking legal action against sponsors abusing workers. The government decided to extend the holiday until April 23 and work will resume on Sunday, April 26, spokesman Tareq Al-Mezrem told an online news conference following a cabinet meeting chaired by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. Mezrem said the cabinet assigned Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Anas Al-Saleh to form a team tasked with taking legal actions against sponsors who fake workforce, as well as taking appropriate measures to prevent abuse of workers.

Meanwhile, a cabinet statement said it assigned the ministerial economic committee and an executive committee to meet with the National Assembly's office to discuss the public debt draft law amidst huge change in domestic and external spending due to the coronavirus. The cabinet also approved a Ministry of Health's (MoH) request to recruit specialized medical teams from abroad to provide support for front-line workers. It

also assigned relevant authorities to extend contracts of workers in services, maintenance, cleaning and operations.

Curfew extended

The government had also decided to extend a partial curfew by two hours as of Monday to be between 5:00 pm and 6:00 am, as well as imposing a lockdown on the areas of Mahboula and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh. Minister Saleh told an online news conference that the extension of the curfew would be effective as of Monday. Saleh also said the government believed it would be useful to have gradual extension of the curfew in order to allow people leave their houses but only when necessary. He urged the public anew to stay indoors even when the curfew ended.

Lockdown on two areas

Saleh also said the government decided to impose a complete lockdown on Mahboula and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh for two weeks. He said the lockdown, to start Monday, would enable the health workers carry out tests of inhabitants in the two areas for their own wellbeing and for the wellbeing of the public in general. Saleh thanked the citizens and expatriates for displaying responsible commitment to the health authorities' instructions which aimed at



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah chairs the cabinet's meeting. — KUNA

preserving their safety. Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah, addressing the same news conference, said health authorities were in the process of containment and to know who was the sources of the virus, as well as containing the sick persons. He urged people anew to wash their hands, stay indoors, avoid gatherings and be aware of social distancing. "Kuwait is witnessing the most important and critical phase in its fight against coronavirus which is containment," Sheikh Basel said, but

he added, aimed at slowing the spread of the virus "not minimizing number of infections." The government measures are "not mere reactions" but based on extensive meetings that started in January and are in coordination with the World Health Organization (WHO), said the minister. Sheikh Basel meanwhile said repatriation of Kuwaitis was undergoing constant review. "I urge all to be patient for the sake of public safety," he said, and hopefully "you will be reunited with your loved ones." — KUNA

hoped to overcome this stage with best results. To contain the virus "we should know the surrounding of infection and those causing the cases and their spread, in addition to isolation and treatment of people who came into close contact with already-infected persons with the aim of preventing spread of the virus," Sheikh Basel added. He said Kuwait underwent preventive measures "which will help us a lot in dealing with the current and future phases."

The measures over the past weeks,

Amir congratulates Sagr on KCCI election

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah addressed a cable of congratulations to Mohammad Jassem Al-Sagr, Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI), on his election uncontested as the chamber's head. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Mubarak sent identical messages to Sagr.



Mohammad Al-Sagr

KCCI's board elected Sagr as chairman during a general assembly meeting held on March 31. He succeeds long-time KCCI chairman Ali Al-Ghanem, who stepped down following 15 years of hard work and efficiency, KCCI said in a statement. The new board members were elected during the meeting as follows: Mohammed Jassem Al-Sagr - Chairman; Abdul Wahab Al-Wazzan - First deputy chairman; Fahad Al-Joa'an - Second deputy chairman; Abdullah Al-Humaidhi - honorary treasurer; Dabbous Al-Dabbous - Deputy honorary treasurer; Osama Al-Nisf - Office member; Essam Mohammed Al-Bahar - Office member.

KCCI added that board members then resumed consultations to organize various committee memberships, not-

ing that the board would have five committees including the membership and commercial norms, labor and industry, trade and transportation, financial and investment and the projects and housing committees.

Besides his vast record in the field of economy, trade and industry, Sagr held several posts locally, regionally and internationally. He is the chairman of the Arab and International Relations Council since August 2009, and has chaired the Arab parliament from 2005 to 2009. Sagr was a prominent member of parliament between 1999 and 2009, a period during which he chaired the foreign affairs' committee. Sagr also served as editor-in-chief of Al-Qabas daily from 1983 to 1999.

UN official applauds Kuwait as among top donors

KUWAIT: Tarek El-Sheikh, United Nations Secretary General Representative and Resident Coordinator to Kuwait, applauded the State of Kuwait for being among top donors for the World Health Organization. He also lauded the state for being in lead among nations fighting the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). In a statement marking World Health Day yesterday, Sheikh expressed deep gratitude to the State of Kuwait and its leadership for contributing \$60 million to WHO for fighting the virus. He lauded, personally and on behalf of international organizations in Kuwait, the country's effective efforts against coronavirus. The State of Kuwait has taken instant and effective measures to stem spread of the virus, he said, underlining humanitarian decisions concerning expatriates who violated residency law, granting them a grace period and pardon of fines to depart the country on the state's expenses. Moreover, he admired courage and professionalism of the Health ministry staff who have been on the frontlines in the combat against COVID-19, extend-



Tarek El-Sheikh

ing the praise to all civil servants involved in the efforts. He furthermore underscored enormous efforts of the Kuwaiti Ministry of Foreign Affairs for facilitating return of all Kuwaitis stranded in various corners of the world. The World Health Day falls this year amid extraordinary and hard circumstances in the whole world where humanity faces an invisible enemy, struggling to win this war against the virus, he said, also expressing gratitude to all medical staff, pharmacists, drivers, cleaners and administrators. — KUNA

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Local

Kuwaiti Municipality imposes further measures to curb coronavirus spread

Majority of car repair shops abiding by regulations



KUWAIT: Director General of Kuwait Municipality Ahmad Al-Manfouhi tours vehicle repair shops in Sharq.



Car repair shops closed in Sharq. —Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh and KUNA



Kuwait Municipality inspectors are seen during the tour.



Kuwait Municipality vehicles parked outside closed car repair shops in Sharq.



Vehicles parked outside closed car repair shops in Sharq.



Kuwait Municipality inspectors tour Sharq's car repair shops.

KUWAIT: Director General of Kuwait Municipality Ahmad Al-Manfouhi took a decision Monday to decrease commercial activities allowed in the country as part of the measures to curb the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19). Speaking to the press during inspections of vehicle repair shops in Shuwaikh and Sharq areas, Manfouhi indicated that activities allowed during the current circumstances were decreased from

17 to nine without specifying. Government entities are battling the spread of the coronavirus; therefore, the Municipality is working to reinforce the Kuwaiti authorities' decisions in this regard, he affirmed.

Manfouhi said that 95 percent of car repair shops were abiding by the cabinet's decision to cease operations during these trying times, adding that shops defying closure will be fined according to the law. —KUNA

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KIPIC completes quarantine for coronavirus

KUWAIT: Kuwait Integrated Petroleum Industries Company (KIPIC) has completed a quarantine facility in Al-Zour with a capacity of 1,700 beds, KIPIC said Monday.

This quarantine facility has been prepared in a record time and will function as a hospital, KIPIC Deputy CEO for Finance and Administrative Services Mahmoud Abul said. He was speaking to the press after a visit by Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) CEO Hashem Hashem, Ministry of Health undersecretary Dr Mustafa Redha, KIPIC CEO Hatem Al-Awadhi and Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) CEO Emad Al-Sultan, to the quarantine facility.

The visit, said Abul, aimed at seeing first-hand readiness of the quarantine which was prepared to help government's efforts to curb spread of coronavirus. KIPIC, he added, worked hard to meet requirements of the Ministry of Health and worked closely with a Ministry team to make sure preparations were good. The quarantine includes a clinic, laboratory, a pharmacy, emergency room, a helipad and a separate residency for medical team, said Abul. He said the quarantine is equipped with an internet service and security staff. Established in 2016 with a KD 1.8 billion (around \$5 billion) capital, KIPIC is the first integrated Kuwaiti company responsible for operating and managing refining, liquefied natural gas, and petrochemicals activities of Al-Zour complex. —KUNA

KFSD gives instructions to avoid 'home quarantine' accidents

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Kuwait Fire Service Directorate's (KFSD) Public Relations Director Brig Khalil Al-Amir met the director of health and environmental safety department at EQUATE petrochemicals Mohammad Al-Shimmari, and head of labor assembly team Abbas Awad, to coordinate for the launch of a campaign which aims at delivering awareness instructions on home quarantine and how to prevent accidents at home during this period. Brig Amir said KFSD will distribute booklets to the public to educate children during this important period. Fire extinguishers and smoke detectors will also be distributed to reduce the amount of accidents that might occur during the house quarantine period due to increased use of electric equipment and kitchens.

News in brief

Water to quarantined areas

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Electricity and Water announced that Mahboula and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh will be provided with truck-loads of drinking water during the period of complete lockdown.

Curfew violators

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Interior arrested six curfew violators yesterday. They include five in Jahra and one in Farwaniya. Five of the detainees are Kuwaiti, while one is an expatriate, the ministry explained.

Home delivery

KUWAIT: Kuwait Union of Consumer Co-operative Societies' Chairman Meshaal Al-Sayyar said that over 67 percent of co-ops are now ready to provide home delivery services, explaining that 45 out of the total 67 co-ops would so far provide the service. Sayyar added the time needed to deliver orders would vary according to each co-op's capabilities, noting that some co-ops provide the service all day long to reduce the number of consumers shopping at all co-ops, while others provide it only during curfew hours. Responding to a question whether there was any shortage in some products or unusual demand on others, Sayyar stressed that demand rates are starting to go back to normal thanks to the recent decisions that helped cut down the numbers of consumers entering supermarkets at a time and limit services to area residents only

Clean fuel project 'completed'

KUWAIT: Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) announced yesterday the completion of its clean fuel project at Al-Ahmadi refinery after the successful launch of the last two production units. Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Waleed Al-Bader indicated that the coal and naphtha hydro treating units would produce 37,000 and 8,400 barrel per day (bpd) respectively. The finalizing of the project in Al-Ahmadi refinery is an important step within the clean fuel project carried out by KNPC, affirmed Al-Bader, adding that operations to complete the project continued in Mina Abdullah refinery. Bader said that he was proud of this national achievement despite the trying time in which Kuwait is trying to curb the spread of the menacing coronavirus (COVID-19). He commended all the technical and professional staff who are pushing forward to realize Kuwait's ambitions. Meanwhile, the company's Deputy CEO for projects Abdullah Al-Ajmi revealed that upon completion, Al-Ahmadi refinery, consisting of 31 units, would have a production capacity of 364,000 barrels bpd. Adding the units in Mina Abdullah, the clean fuel project will have a capacity of 800,000 bpd, said Al-Ajmi in regards to the project, which cost KD 4.6 billion (\$14.7 billion). —KUNA

Local

Kuwait urges expats without residency permits to benefit from grace period

Legal action against sponsors telling workers to leave Mahboula



KUWAIT: Deputy Premier and Interior Minister Anas Al-Saleh is seen during a visit to a ministry location in Farwaniya designated to receive expatriates who are in violation of the residency law.



Deputy Premier and Interior Minister Anas Al-Saleh speaks with Interior Ministry officials during the visit.—Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

KUWAIT: Deputy Premier and Interior Minister Anas Al-Saleh Monday urged all expatriates in violation of residency law to benefit from a grace period granted by government to allow them to leave the country without payment of fines. Saleh, also Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs, warned those expatriates they would not be allowed to return to work in Kuwait after end of grace period, due end of this month.

Saleh made the remarks to reporters during visits to Ministry of Interior's locations in Farwaniya Governorate designated to receive expatriates who were in violation of the residency law, a Ministry of Interior (MoI) statement said. Monday was the first day for the Egyptian expatriates who can come forward to locations designated by MoI to complete procedures before they are placed in a housing facility and then airlifted to their country. The Egyptian community has five days to apply.

Abusive sponsors

Saleh said sponsors abusing expatriates would be held accountable. "There will not be any backtracking on this issue and we will deal with it firmly and

fiercely," he underlined. He said there has been coordination with the Egyptian officials to facilitate the repatriation. Saleh thanked the MoI personnel for the way they were dealing with the expatriates.

The Interior Ministry had issued an amnesty allowing residency violators to leave the country between April 1 and April 30 without paying any fines or airfare with a chance to return to Kuwait later. The amnesty was issued in view of the circumstances the country is currently going through and as part of the precautionary measures taken to fight the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). Individuals desiring to procure valid residencies in Kuwait and are willing to pay the fines without being subjected to investigations will be allowed to pay the fines and legalize their status if they meet the required conditions.

Special centers in Farwaniya were allocated to accommodate violators who finalize their papers pending departure. Male violators are received at Al-

Muthanna primary school for boys, Farwaniya, block 1, street 122, while female violators are received at Farwaniya primary school for girls in Farwaniya, block 1, street 76. Violators are received from 8 am till 2 pm according to the following dates and nationalities: Philippines (April 1-5, 2020), Egypt (April 6-10), India (April 11-15), Bangladesh (April 16-20), Sri Lanka (April 21-25), other nationalities (April 26-30, 2020).

The Interior Ministry later opened two new locations in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh to receive residency violators from all nationalities: Female violators are received at Roufayda Al-Aslameya School - Block 4 - Street 200, while male violators are received at Na'em bin Masod School - Block 4 - Street 250.

Legal action

Separately, the Interior Ministry announced that police on Monday stopped expatriate workers from leaving Mahboula, south of Kuwait City, as instructed by their



Deputy Premier and Interior Minister Anas Al-Saleh speaks to reporters during the visit.

sponsors, and ordered them to return to their homes. The ministry knows identities of the sponsors of those workers who wanted to move their employees outside Mahboula and compelled them to return them to their homes, a ministry statement said. The ministry, it affirmed, would be tak-

ing legal action against those sponsoring companies. Police forces are monitoring all areas to make sure such things won't recur, asserted the ministry. The government decided to impose a complete lockdown on Mahboula and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh for two weeks starting Monday. —KUNA

Abusive sponsors held accountable



Deputy Premier and Interior Minister Anas Al-Saleh is seen during the visit.



Egyptians wait inside a school that was turned into a center to receive residency violators wishing to avail an amnesty Kuwait announced for April.



A policeman checks an applicant's papers as Egyptians queue up outside the school.



Egyptians queue up outside a school that was turned into a center to receive residency violators wishing to avail the amnesty.



Egyptians enter a school that was turned into a center to receive residency violators wishing to avail the amnesty.



A policeman stands as Egyptians queue up outside the center.

REQUIRED
Office Boy
Skills:
• Should be honest, respectful and trustworthy.
• Transferable visa 18.
• Good looking.
• Language: Arabic & English.
Cont: **+965 5500 1860**
Email: **hr235ad@gmail.com**



Cardinal freed after winning an appeal

In first, US brands white supremacists as foreign terrorists



NEW YORK: Bodies are moved to a refrigerator truck serving as a temporary morgue outside of Wyckoff Hospital in the Borough of Brooklyn in New York. — AFP

New York struggles with the dead

Morgues overflow; undertakers overwhelmed

NEW YORK: Refrigerator trucks parked outside hospital doors, overwhelmed undertakers, and talk about temporary burials in parks: America's coronavirus epicenter of New York is grappling with how to deal with the dead. As the Big Apple's death toll from COVID-19 soared to 3,485 Monday, images of bodies covered in sheets being transported on stretchers by health workers in protective suits are a common sight outside hospitals.

The trucks are storing bodies that are accumulating too quickly for funeral directors to pick them up directly from hospitals. On Monday morning, AFP saw nine bodies loaded into trucks outside Wyckoff Hospital in Brooklyn. Several undertakers interviewed by AFP said they were struggling to deal with New York state's coronavirus death toll of more than 500 a day. Between Friday and Saturday, a high of 630 deaths were recorded.

"The majority of funeral homes do not have refrigeration or (have) limited refrigeration," said Ken Brew-

ster, owner of Crowe's Funeral Homes in Queens. "If you don't have the space... you need those trucks," added Brewster, whose small business has been bombarded with requests for funeral services for COVID-19 patients over the past week.

'Like 9/11'

Pat Marmo manages five funeral homes across the city. He is finding it difficult to cope with the stress generated by influx of bodies, particularly because he himself just lost a cousin and close friend to the pandemic. "The hospitals are pushing (us). They want the people picked up (as quickly as possible) and the funeral homes don't have the facilities to handle these bodies," he said.

Marmo estimates that his homes are currently



COVID-19's death toll soars to 3,485

dealing with three times more bodies that normal and that burials will last well into next month. "It's almost like 9/11, going on for days and days and days," he said, referring to the worst terror strikes on US soil

back on September 11, 2001. Undertakers are so overcrowded that a city official raised the possibility Monday of carrying out temporary burials in a public park.

"Trenches will be dug for 10 caskets in a line. It will be done in a dignified, orderly and temporary manner. But it will be tough for NYers to take," tweeted Mark Levine, a Manhattan council representative. The comments caused quite a stir in America's most populous city, which has already been transformed by the pandemic, including

in Central Park where a field hospital is tending to virus patients.

Apex of deaths?

The mayor's spokeswoman, Freddi Goldstein, stressed that the city government was not considering using local parks as cemeteries. But she added that Hart Island, where around one million New Yorkers are buried in mass graves, may be used "for temporary burials, if the need grows." Mayor Bill de Blasio himself spoke of the possibility of temporary burials "to tide us over until the end of the crisis."

"We are not at that point," he told reporters, before refusing to give any more details. Governor Andrew Cuomo announced Monday that the number of deaths across New York state had flattened out since Saturday's high, below 600 a day. He suggested the state may be at the peak of its pandemic, but extended stay-at-home measures until April 29, saying now was not the time to end social distancing. — AFP

US coronavirus deaths pass bleak 10,000 milestone

WASHINGTON: Americans were put on notice Monday not to let up in the fight against the coronavirus, as a grim milestone of 10,000 deaths cast a pall over the first signs of optimism about the outbreak's trajectory. The United States has emerged as one of the world's worst-hit nations, with a steadily mounting number of fatalities and millions facing the possibility of economic ruin.

Authorities began the week by telling frightened communities to brace for one of the worst periods yet in an outbreak that has not yet reached its peak. Baltimore-based Johns Hopkins University, which has been keeping a running tally of coronavirus numbers, said more than 368,000 US cases had been confirmed, with 10,986 deaths by late Monday. Only Italy (16,523) and Spain (13,341) have seen more of their citizens killed by the pandemic.

There was a glimmer of hope, however, in New York, the main focus of the US outbreak, where there have been more than 4,750 deaths statewide and 130,000 cases. Governor Andrew Cuomo said Monday the death rate had been "effectively flat" for two days. The state reported 599 new deaths, similar to Sunday's tally of 594 and down from a record 630 on Saturday. But the governor ordered schools and non-essential businesses to remain shut for a further three weeks, telling reporters: "Now is not the time to be lax."

'Social distancing is working'

"It is hopeful but it is also inconclusive," Cuomo said, adding that it would be a "mistake" to relax restrictions too early. "If the curve is turning, it's because the rate of infection is going down. If the rate of infection is going down, it's because social distancing is working." The pandemic has killed nearly 75,000 worldwide since the new coron-



NEW YORK: A Muslim health worker prays outside of a special coronavirus intake area at Maimonides Medical Center in the Borough Park neighborhood of the Brooklyn borough of New York City. — AFP

avirus emerged in December in China, according to an AFP tally compiled from official sources.

Authorities have warned that between 100,000 and 240,000 people could die in the United States, even in a best-case scenario with social distancing guidelines being observed. Nine states—all controlled by Republican governors—have still not yet ordered total lockdowns, much to the frustration of public health experts. The Wisconsin Supreme Court blocked a last-minute attempt by the governor of the midwestern state to postpone the next day's Democratic presidential primary and other elections because of the coronavirus epidemic and ruled that the vote should go ahead.

In a 4-2 decision, the top state court overturned an executive order from the Democratic Governor Tony Evers, who had sought to delay the election until June citing the threat to poll workers and voters from the virus. Wisconsin, which is among those under stay-at-home orders, would have joined around 15 US states that have already delayed their primaries. Evers moved to

postpone the election unilaterally after the Republican-majority state Senate and state Assembly ignored his repeated appeals for a delay.

Pathway from crisis

Although hotspots like New York face a dire lack of protective gear, ventilators and medics, there was further cause for optimism, with early-hit states like Washington and California demonstrating a possible pathway out of the crisis. Washington state appears to be on the downward slope of its case curve and has even sent 400 ventilators to New York, but its governor Jay Inslee said he feared a second wave because of the on-going patchwork response.

"Even if Washington gets on top of this fully, if another state doesn't, it can come back and come across our borders two months from now, so this is important to have a national success," he told NBC. California is also showing how it is possible to get on top of the crisis, said epidemiologist Brandon Brown of the University of California, Riverside. — AFP

'Dead city': Singapore paralyzed

SINGAPORE: Singapore's usually bustling business district was almost deserted yesterday as most workplaces in the city-state closed to stem the spread of the coronavirus after a surge in cases. The financial hub has won praise for using a tough regime of testing and tracing contacts of the sick to keep its outbreak largely in check, but has seen a jump in new infections in recent days.

Authorities previously resisted the kind of draconian measures seen in worse-hit countries—but have now ordered the closure of all businesses deemed non-essential as well as schools, and have asked people to stay home. There were just a handful of people in a usually packed major square in the business district Tuesday morning as workplaces closed.

"It feels like a dead city, everyone is

scared, they're all hiding at home," Jenny Lee, who works at an insurance brokers said. "All the crowds have disappeared." Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong urged Singaporeans to "do our part to support our healthcare professionals by staying at home, and complying with the enhanced measures in place". Schools will close from Wednesday, with the tougher restrictions set to last a month. The city-state reported 66 more COVID-19 cases Monday, bringing its total so far to 1,375, including six deaths.

While these figures are low compared to many other countries, authorities nevertheless decided to take action after a rise in locally transmitted cases in the city of 5.7 million. The government at the weekend quarantined almost 20,000 foreign migrant workers for two weeks after a growing number of infections were discovered in their dormitories. Large numbers of foreign laborers, mostly from South Asia, work in construction in the city-state and usually live in sprawling dormitory complexes. Globally, the virus has claimed more than 74,000 victims out of 1.34 million confirmed cases. — AFP



SINGAPORE: A general view shows the central business district of Singapore as the country ordered the closure of all businesses deemed non-essential as well as schools to combat the spread of the COVID-19 novel coronavirus. — AFP

International

Pain, solitude, fear: Stories of the COVID-19 survivors

Emotional and harrowing stories of the pain and fear

PARIS: A sense of death stalking the hospital ward, fear of dying alone, tearful despair and disarray at home, solitude, anger and the desire to share, or change their life: 12 people from different parts of the world who have survived COVID-19 share emotional and harrowing stories of the pain and fear after catching the virus:

A painful 'roller coaster'

With no pre-existing health conditions, South Korean engineering professor Park Hyun, 47, said he'd originally thought the coronavirus was "not my problem", until he developed symptoms and ended up in intensive care in the southern city of Busan. It had started with a dry cough and sore throat, he said, followed a few days later by a shortness of breath so severe he fainted while waiting for a hospital coronavirus test. It came back positive and he was admitted to hospital where his condition fluctuated wildly every day and several times he thought he would die.

"It was like a roller coaster," he said. "I was feeling like there is a thick plate pressuring my chest and also needles poking my chest." Some of his symptoms may have been the side effects of his treatment, he believes. But after eight days and two negative tests, he was discharged. "I had a very bad situation," Park said. Whenever his condition was slightly better "I was thinking that might be my last time where I can write something in my life," he added. "So I tried to write something short on Facebook to share with friends."

'Death prowls' the ward

Cardiologist Fabio Biferali spent eight days "isolated from the world" at Rome's Policlinico Umberto I hospital in an orthodontics department that had been converted into an intensive care unit. Describing the

pain he felt as "strange", the 65-year-old said it almost resembled having a little monkey on his back, just like one of his patients had described it to him. Oxygen therapy is painful and finding a radial artery is difficult, he said. "They would do it up to twice a day. Being a doctor helped me bear the pain. Other patients would desperately shout 'enough' enough."

The hardest part was the nights, alone with his fears. "I couldn't sleep, anxiety invaded the room... nightmares came, death prowled," he said. "I was afraid of dying without being able to cling on to the hands of my family and friends, despair overcame me." While medical staff were covered head to toe in protective gear, Biferali said he found some solace in being able to see their "affectionate" eyes behind the glass masks and hear their voices. "Many were young, doctors on the front line. It was a moment of hope."

Tearful despair and disarray at home

Going to 'gate of hell and back'

Wan Chunhui, 44, said he was "terrified" at first but that going to the "gate of hell" and coming back to survive the virus had transformed his outlook on life. "I think the biggest change for me is that my way of

looking at things is different now," said Wan, who spent 17 days at the makeshift Huoshenshan Hospital in the Chinese city of Wuhan, in central Hubei province, where the outbreak began. "I feel really calm about everything, really calm... I went to the gate of hell and came back. I saw with my own eyes that others failed to recover and died, which has had a big impact on me."

He had initially isolated himself to protect his family after getting a temperature, but, still feverish a couple of days later, he walked an hour to hospital. Tests were not available but he was prescribed antibiotics and flu medication and asked to quarantine himself at home due to a hospital bed shortage. "I was terrified at first," he said. "But I went back home, switched to a positive

epidemic spreads across provinces, and then beyond the borders of the mainland. France is the first country to report a case in Europe, at the end of January. The early infections are found in people either from China or who have recently returned from there. The illness, at this stage generally described as a form of flu, appears particularly dangerous for older or more vulnerable people.

China province under lockdown

In the hope of slowing the spread of the epidemic, Chinese authorities take the radical step of confinement, first locking down the city of Wuhan and then, on January 25, the whole of Hubei province, cutting off its 56 million people from the rest of the world. Other countries begin repatriating their citizens and putting them under quarantine on arrival home. At the end of January, with almost 6,000 cases officially recorded in mainland China, the number of infections from the new coronavirus overtakes that of SARS. The WHO declares a global health emergency, but it stops short of recommending trade and travel restrictions.

Tourists blocked

Nevertheless, international airlines begin reducing their flights to mainland China and tourist groups start postponing holidays. Thousands of people are stuck on several cruise liners after cases are detected on board. More than 3,700 are quarantined from February 5 on a ship off Japan's coast and more than 700 infections emerge among the passengers and crew in a few weeks.

genarians develops a form serious enough to require hospitalization. Besides age, having a chronic illness—for example, respiratory failure, heart disease, history of stroke, cancer—is also a risk factor.

In a recent report on 10,000 deaths, the Italian Higher Institute of Health (ISS) identified common existing illnesses in the deceased. The most common are hypertension (73.5 percent of cases), diabetes (31 percent) and coronary heart disease (27 percent). Finally, according to an extensive analysis published on February 24 by Chinese researchers in the American medical journal "Jama", the disease is mild in 80.9 percent of cases, "serious" in 13.8 percent of cases and "critical" in 4.7 percent of cases.

How many deaths can we expect?

The statistical correlation between the number of deaths in the world and the total number of officially registered cases, suggests COVID-19 kills approximately five percent of diagnosed patients, with disparities according to different countries. But that fatality rate has to be treated with caution as it is unclear how many people have actually been infected. Since many patients seem to develop few or no symptoms, their number is likely to be greater than the cases detected, which would therefore lower this rate. In addition, countries have very different testing policies and some do not systematically test all suspected cases.

A few weeks ago Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Infectious Diseases in the US, told Congress that the fatality rate was much lower than five percent. "If you count all the cases of minimally symptomatic or asymptomatic infections, that probably brings the mortality rates down to some-



PARIS: Medical personnel wearing protective gear are seen outside the Gare d'Austerlitz rail station in Paris during an evacuation operation of patients infected with COVID-19 onboard a TGV high speed train. —AFP

mood, and braced myself for the situation. Anyway it's pointless to panic," Wan said. The 44-year-old investor and married father of a nine-year-old daughter already suffered from high blood pressure before the virus. At home, he began recording his illness in an online diary, but a bad cough set in and he was admitted to hospital. Hormone therapy helped lower his temperature, although he remained short of breath, but medical supplies were scarce, Wan said, and healthcare workers wore poor-quality protective suits and rubbish bags as shoe covers. Wan was transferred to one of the two field hospitals built for virus sufferers in Wuhan, a well-supplied centre, he said, where he was treated mostly with Western medicines.

Keeping the faith

Song Myung-hee, 72, was afraid of dying alone after being infected during a service at the Shincheonji Church of Jesus in the southern city of Daegu, a secretive religious group at the centre of South Korea's coronavirus outbreak. She was at the same event as the woman known as Patient 31, a 61-year-old who attended four services before being diagnosed with the virus. Song was quarantined at home as a precaution but remained asymptomatic for several days before the virus struck suddenly with a severe cough. "I could not sleep at all," she told AFP. "It lasted for two days. I had to hold a plastic bag at all times because I kept on coughing up phlegm." —AFP

Coronavirus: Months of global upheaval

PARIS: In the three months since China first came across a new coronavirus, the world has been plunged into turmoil. A pandemic has been declared, schools and shops from New York to New Delhi shuttered, half the global population is confined in some form, while governments have scrambled to announce massive aid packages amid recession fears. Here is a look back at the dramatic first months of 2020:

A new coronavirus strain

On January 8, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) says cases of pneumonia reported since December in the central Chinese city of Wuhan, could be due to a new coronavirus strain. In December, 59 people are officially diagnosed with the illness, which can cause serious respiratory problems. The confirmed cases include several employees from a Wuhan market selling live animals for food.

Spectre of SARS

The new virus reignites grim memories of SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome), another coronavirus that hit mainland China and Hong Kong in 2002-2003, killing nearly 800 people in some 30 countries. A first virus death is announced on January 11 in China and the

The veil begins to lift on coronavirus

PARIS: Just three months ago, few people even knew the word "coronavirus". But as the disease continues to spread across the globe, infecting and killing thousands, and causing millions to live in self-isolation, it has become a watchword for the daily life of billions. Here are some of the questions that have been raised since coronavirus became headline news around the world:

Who is most at risk?

The severity of COVID-19, the disease caused by the new coronavirus, increases with age, as various studies have shown. Published on March 31, the latest edition of the British medical journal "The Lancet" shows that the disease is on average much more dangerous for those over 60, with a mortality rate of 6.4 percent (among confirmed cases). The mortality rate climbs to 13.4 percent for the over 80s against just 0.32 percent of deaths for the under 60s, according to studies made mainly on several hundred Chinese cases observed in February.

Similarly, the study shows that the proportion of patients requiring hospitalization increases sharply with age: 0.04 percent for 10 to 19-year-olds, 4.3 percent for 40 to 49-year-olds, 11.8 percent for 60 to 69, and 18.4 percent for those over 80. The last of these figures means that about one in five octo-



PARIS: French first aid workers from the Protection Civile Paris Seine, wearing personal protection equipment (PPE) push a male patient on a gurney, suspected of being infected with COVID-19, into a hospital. —AFP

Scaly mammal link?

Early February researchers in China identify the pangolin, a scaly endangered mammal, as the potential link that facilitated the spread of the virus from bats to humans. When Li Wenliang, a 34-year-old ophthalmologist in Wuhan succumbs to the disease, his death unleashes a wave of anger in China at authorities. The doctor was among a group of people who sounded the alarm about the virus in late December, only to be reprimanded and censored by the authorities in Hubei province. The US raises criticisms over what it calls a lack of transparency from China in its response to the outbreak, but the WHO defends Beijing, listing the ways it has collaborated with the international community. Although much remains unknown about the new coronavirus, the disease gets a new name: "COVID-19".



ORLY: Photo shows a military A400M plane waiting to be loaded with patients infected with novel coronavirus for transportation from Orly airport to a hospital outside of the Paris region. —AFP

where around one percent," he said, adding that this still makes coronavirus "10 times more lethal than the seasonal flu". The study published in "The Lancet" on March 31 estimated the proportion of deaths among the confirmed cases at 1.38 percent.

However, the danger of a disease does not only depend on the overall death rate but also on its ability to spread. Even if only one percent of patients die, "it can make significant figures if 30 percent or 60 percent of a population is infected," said Simon Cauchemez, of the Pasteur Institute in Paris. The other factor that is affecting the fatality rate of this new disease is the congestion of hospitals, caused by a sudden and a massive influx of cases. This complicates matters not only for those patients with severe forms of COVID-19 but for everyone else as well. —AFP

Coronavirus: A three-month timeline

Paris: Key developments since the novel coronavirus was announced three months ago, setting out on a global rampage which has left tens of thousands of people dead.

New virus

On January 8, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) says a new coronavirus could be behind a pneumonia epidemic documented in December in the Chinese city of Wuhan. China announces its first death in Wuhan on January 11. Through January, cases emerge outside China.

Epicer center quarantined

On January 24, the first cases in Europe are recorded, in France. Hubei province follows Wuhan in being placed in quarantine on January 25.

International emergency

On January 28, Germany and Japan announce the first two confirmed instances of human-to-human transmission of COVID-19 outside China. Nations rush to evacuate their citizens from China. On January 30, the WHO declares a "public health emergency of international concern", without recommending limiting travel and trade with China.

First deaths outside China, Asia

On February 2, the Philippines reports the first death outside China, a man from Wuhan. On February 7, the WHO warns that the world is running out of masks and other protective equipment. A week later, France reports the first death confirmed outside Asia, a Chinese tourist. On February 19, as the toll tops 2,000, the WHO calls for "proportionate" actions to COVID-19's international spread.

Serial cancellations

Major global firms express concerns about the sudden impact on their activities and bottom lines. Trade shows, sporting competitions, arts events and festivities are cancelled. Flights to China are suspended.

Most cases outside China

The number of cases spirals in Italy, South Korea and Iran. On February 25, the WHO says there is a risk of a pandemic. The next day the number of new cases in the rest of the world surpasses that of China.

Italy lockdown

The OECD lowers its global growth forecast for 2020. By March 6, more than 100,000 cases have been recorded around the world. On March 8, northern Italy is locked down, quickly followed by the rest of the country. The next day a crash in oil prices causes global stock markets to fall sharply.

'Pandemic'

On March 11, the WHO says COVID-19 is a pandemic. US borders gradually close to around 30 countries. Governments and central banks roll out massive economic support measures.

Europe epicenter

On March 13, the WHO says Europe is the pandemic's new epicenter. Spain on March 14 and France on March 17 confine their populations. Other European countries advise people to stay home and limit contact.

Planes grounded, borders closed

Airlines slash flights. Many countries shut their borders. By March 18, more than 200,000 cases have been registered.

Italy hardest hit

On March 19, Italy becomes the country with the highest death toll. A long list of countries and territories announce confinement measures. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) warns against a worse recession than the one that followed the 2008 world financial crisis. —AFP

International

Cardinal freed after winning appeal over 'child sex abuse'

An abrupt end to most high-profile paedophilia case

BRISBANE: Cardinal George Pell was released from prison yesterday, hours after Australia's High Court quashed his conviction for child sex abuse, bringing to an abrupt end the most high-profile paedophilia case faced by the Catholic Church. The 78-year-old left Barwon Prison near Melbourne after the court overturned five counts of sexually abusing two 13-year-old choirboys in the 1990s. Pell, who had steadfastly maintained his innocence throughout a lengthy court process, exited the jail where he has been held for the last year and issued a statement saying that a "serious injustice" had been remedied by the decision.

A jury had convicted Pell of the offences in December 2018 and that decision was upheld by a three-judge panel in Victoria state's Court of Appeal last August, in a split 2-1 verdict. But Australia's High Court found there was "a significant possibility that an innocent person has been convicted because the evidence did not establish guilt to the requisite standard of proof". The seven justices unanimously found a lower court had "failed to engage with the question of whether there remained a reasonable possibility that the offending had not taken place".

However Pell's legal woes may not be at an end, as he faces several possible civil cases including from the father of one of the alleged victims - now deceased - who is planning to launch a claim for damages.

The prosecution's case had relied heavily on the testimony of Pell's surviving accuser, who told a closed-door hearing that Pell had sexually assaulted the two boys in a Melbourne cathedral while he was archbishop of the city. The second choirboy - who is not known to have ever spoken of the abuse - died of a drug overdose in 2014. Neither man can be identified for legal reasons.

Lisa Flynn, the lawyer for the deceased



Court overturns 5 counts of sexual abuse case

man's father, said her client was "disgusted" and "in utter disbelief" at the outcome. "He is struggling to comprehend the decision by the High Court of Australia. He says he no longer has faith in our country's criminal justice system," she said. "He is furious the man he believes is responsible for sexually abusing his son was convicted by a unanimous jury only to have that decision overturned today."

Victims' support group the Blue Knot Foundation said the decision would be

"crushing" for survivors of abuse. "The child sexual abuse pandemic within the Catholic Church has threatened the safety of millions of children, the adults they become and the very moral fibre of what it means to be human," said Blue Knot president Cathy Kezelman. "Pell now has his freedom, but many abuse victims have never been free - trapped in the horror of the crimes which decimated their lives."

In his statement, Pell thanked his lawyers, supporters and family and said he held "no ill will" toward his accuser. "I do not want my acquittal to add to the hurt and bitterness so many feel; there is certainly hurt and bitterness enough," he said. "However my trial was not a referendum on the Catholic Church; nor a referendum on how Church authorities in Australia dealt with the crime of paedophilia in the Church. "The point was whether I had committed these awful crimes, and I did not."

Coronavirus restrictions meant the verdict was delivered to a near-empty Brisbane courtroom - in stark contrast to earlier hearings that drew large crowds of his supporters and detractors, the world's media and members of the legal profession. Pell's lawyers had argued there were "compounding improbabilities" in the case, including that Pell would not have had the time or opportunity to molest the boys in the priests' sacristy after Mass, when he would usually be on the cathedral steps



ANAKIE: Australian Cardinal George Pell leaves after being released from Barwon Prison near Anakie, some 70 kilometers west of Melbourne yesterday. — AFP

greeting members of the congregation.

The High Court found that though the jury had "assessed the complainant's evidence as thoroughly credible and reliable", unchallenged evidence from other witnesses required the jury "acting rationally" to have "entertained a reasonable doubt as to the applicant's guilt". Victoria state police, who had investigated the allegations against Pell, said they "respect the decision" of the High Court and remained "committed to investigating sexual assault offences and providing justice for victims

no matter how many years have passed".

Pell's previous trial had been held under a court-ordered veil of secrecy to ensure he received fair treatment. At the same time, he was quietly removed from top Church bodies but the Vatican resisted launching an internal investigation. He had been facing a second trial over separate child abuse allegations, though prosecutors decided not to proceed and withdrew all of the charges. The former Vatican treasurer remains in the priesthood, but his future role in the Catholic Church remains unclear. — AFP

News in brief

Chad former dictator freed

DAKAR: A Senegal judge has granted Chad's former dictator Hissene Habre two months' leave from prison, where he is serving life for crimes against humanity, as the jail is being used to hold new detainees in coronavirus quarantine. Habre, who ruled Chad from 1982 to 1990, was convicted of war crimes and crimes against humanity at an African Union-backed trial in the Senegalese capital Dakar in 2016. A Chadian commission of inquiry estimated 40,000 people were killed by his regime. After he was overthrown, Habre fled to Senegal and for more than 20 years lived freely in an upmarket Dakar suburb with his wife and children. — AFP

Guinea's new constitution

CONAKRY: Guinea's President Alpha Conde has enacted a new constitution following a referendum last month on changes that critics fear are aimed at extending his time in office. Changing the constitution was hugely controversial in the west African nation, spurring mass demonstrations that left dozens dead. After months of tensions, Conde enacted the new charter by decree read on national television on Monday, the same day he approved a 292 million euro (\$315 million) "economic response plan" to the coronavirus pandemic. A former opposition figure jailed under previous hardline regimes, Conde made history in 2010 as the first democratically elected president in a country with a chronic history of military coups and turmoil. Voters returned him to office in 2015 for his second and final five-year term under the current constitution, but critics say he has become increasingly authoritarian. — AFP

Abandoned animals die

KARACHI: Abandoned when Pakistan's largest cities went into lockdown, hundreds of caged cats, dogs and rabbits have been found dead inside pet markets hurriedly shuttered as the coronavirus spread. Animals still alive in the corner of Karachi's sprawling Empress Market were rescued only after activists appealed to the authorities for access. Two weeks into the shutdown, Ayesha Chundrigar could hear the cries of the pets from outside the shops, which together housed up to 1,000 animals. "When we got inside, the majority of them were dead, about 70 percent. Their bodies were lying on the ground," Chundrigar, who runs ACF Animal Rescue said. — AFP

UN refrains from blaming Russia

UNITED NATIONS: A UN board of inquiry investigating attacks on civilian establishments in Syria, including hospitals, has refrained from directly holding Russia responsible, according to a summary of its report published Monday. The coordinates of the sites had been communicated to the belligerents by the United Nations to protect them from air strikes. Without mentioning Russia, the investigation concluded that in four out of the seven cases studied by the board - a school, a health center, a surgical hospital and a protection center - "the government of Syria and/or its allies had carried out the airstrike." In 2019, The New York Times published an exhaustive investigation, notably including recordings of Russian pilots, that directly incriminated Russia in attacks on hospitals in Syria. — AFP

In first, US brands white supremacists as foreign terrorists

WASHINGTON: The United States on Monday branded a Russian far-right group as a foreign terrorist organization, the first time it has targeted white supremacists with tools regularly used against jihadist groups. The State Department said that the Russian Imperial Movement runs two paramilitary training camps in Saint Petersburg and has pulled in neo-Nazis from across the Western world.

"This is the first time the United States has ever designated white supremacist terrorists, illustrating how seriously this administration takes the threat," said Nathan Sales, the State Department counterterrorism coordinator. The Russian Imperial Movement and three of its leaders were blacklisted as Specially Designated Global Terrorists, meaning that they will not be admitted to the United States and that any US assets they hold will be blocked.

Sales said that the United States was alarmed by the rise in white supremacist violence around the world, including attacks on Muslims in Christchurch, New Zealand, and against Hispanics in El Paso, Texas. President Donald Trump has faced widespread criticism for his uncritical treatment of white supremacists as well as his rhetoric that demonizes non-white immigrants as criminals.

Most notoriously, Trump said that neo-Nazis



SAINT PETERSBURG: Photo shows members of the 'Russian Imperial Movement', a nationalist group in Russia posing for a picture with weapon simulators at a training base in Saint-Petersburg. The United States on April 6, 2020 branded a Russian far-right group as a foreign terrorist organization, the first time it has targeted white supremacists with tools regularly used against Islamist extremists. — AFP

whose 2017 march in Charlottesville, Virginia devolved into violence included "very fine people." Sales insisted that the administration was targeting white supremacists. He said that the designation was made possible by an order by Trump that allows designation of terrorists based on their training, not necessarily participation in violence. But he said that two extremists from Sweden, known for its generosity toward refugees, traveled in August 2016 to Saint Petersburg to undergo 11 days of paramilitary training.

They returned to Sweden and carried out a series of attacks including a bombing outside a migrant center in Gothenburg that gravely injured one person, the State Department said. "This group has innocent blood on its hands," Sales said. "Today's designations send an unmistakable message that the United States will not hesitate to use our sanctions authorities aggressively, and that we are prepared to target any foreign terrorist group, regardless of ideology, that threatens our citizens, our interests abroad, or our allies," he said. — AFP

World 'short of' 6 million nurses

GENEVA: As COVID-19 captures global headlines, the World Health Organization (WHO) warned yesterday that the world needs nearly six million nurses. The UN's health agency along with partners Nursing Now and the International Council of Nurses (ICN) underscored in a report the crucial role played by nurses, who make up more than half of all health workers worldwide.

"Nurses are the backbone of any health system," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in a statement. "Today, many nurses find themselves on the frontline in the battle against COVID-19," he noted, adding that it was vital they "get the support they need to keep the world healthy." The report said that there are just under 28 million nurses on the planet. In the five years leading up to 2018, the number grew by 4.7 million. "But this still leaves a global shortfall of 5.9 million," the WHO said, pointing out that the greatest gaps were in poorer countries in Africa, southeast Asia, the Middle East and parts of South America. The report urged countries to identify gaps in their nursing workforce and invest in nursing education, jobs and leadership.

Shortages 'exhaust workforce'

ICN chief executive Howard Catton told a virtual briefing that



ISTANBUL: This combination of 12 pictures shows medical staffers on the frontline treating patients of the COVID-19 (novel coronavirus) pandemic. — AFP

infection rates, medication errors and mortality rates "are all higher where there are too few nurses". Furthermore, "shortages exhaust our current nursing workforce", he added. In fighting the pandemic, Mary Watkins, who co-chaired the report for Nursing Now, called for urgent investment in virus tests for healthcare workers.

"We have a very high proportion of healthcare workers not going to work because they're afraid that they've been infected and that they can't prove that they have not got the infection - or that they've had it, and they're over it," she said. Catton said that 23 nurses had died in Italy and cited figures suggesting that around 100 health workers had died around the world. Meanwhile he said there were reports of nine percent of health workers being infected in Italy and "we're now hearing of rates of infections up to 14 percent in Spain".

He also cited reports of "completely unacceptable and reprehensible" attacks on health workers

battling COVID-19, largely due to ignorance about their work, combined with countries not doing enough to protect them. "COVID is putting it into a very stark lens for us all," he said, though he welcomed the growing appreciation in some countries of nurse's work. Catton said that could help change perceptions of the value of nursing - which in turn might help make it a more attractive profession.

Male recruitment

Beyond COVID-19, Watkins said many wealthier countries were not producing enough nurses to meet their own healthcare needs, and were therefore reliant on migration, exacerbating shortages in poorer countries. "Eighty percent of the world's nurses only currently serve 50 percent of the world's population," she noted. Catton warned of risks that richer countries would rely on the Philippines and India to "supply the world with nurses", which could lead to significant shortages in India. — AFP

Trump, Biden finally bury hatchet to talk on coronavirus

WASHINGTON: Democrat Joe Biden and President Donald Trump finally spoke by phone Monday, both sides confirmed, ending days of teasing and squabbling between the presidential election rivals to discuss the national coronavirus upheaval. The call marked a rare moment of unity for the country seven months before election day and during a frightening health and economic crisis.

"We had a really wonderful warm conversation," centered on the pandemic, Trump said at a regular briefing by his coronavirus task force. "He gave me his point of view and I fully understood that," Trump said, adding they spoke for about 15 minutes. "I appreciate his calling." Biden's communication director confirmed the two men had "a good call." Biden "shared several suggestions for actions" the administration can take "to address the ongoing coronavirus pandemic," Kate Bedingfield said on Twitter.

He also "expressed his appreciation for the spirit of the American people in meeting the challenges facing the nation," she added. The idea of a telephone call between Trump and Biden, who is self-isolating at home like much of the country, had been in the air for days. Last week, Trump said he'd "love to speak with" Biden, adding, "I always found him to be a nice guy." On Thursday, Biden responded that he was "happy to hear he'll take my call." But if Republican Trump sat all weekend by the phone, he was left disappointed - and by Monday morning the pair were back to trading barbs. "What ever happened to that phone call he told the Fake News he wanted to make to me?" Trump complained on Twitter. — AFP

Business

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CARDIFF: An electronic display board shows the price in pence per litre for petrol and diesel fuels, at a Tesco supermarket in Cardiff, south Wales as life in Britain continues during the nationwide lockdown to combat the novel coronavirus pandemic. — AFP

OPEC+ may reach output cut if US joins

Oil prices rebound on hopes for production cut deal

DUBAI/LONDON/MOSCOW: Major oil producers including Saudi Arabia and Russia are likely to agree to cut production at a meeting tomorrow but only if the United States joins the effort, aimed at coping with the disastrous effect of the coronavirus on fuel demand, three OPEC+ sources said.

Worldwide oil demand has dropped by roughly 30 percent, or about 30 million barrels a day, at the same time that Saudi Arabia and Russia have been flooding markets with extra supply.

Meanwhile, oil prices rebounded yesterday on fresh hopes an OPEC-led meeting this week will reach an agreement to reduce oversupply and shore up the market. Prices have fallen sharply since expectations for a quick deal to cut output levels were dashed, but the rescheduling to tomorrow of a meeting of major crude producers boosted sentiment.

US benchmark West Texas Intermediate was up 3.83 percent to \$27.08 a barrel in Asian morning trade.



Norway, Canada signal willingness to cut output

A barrel of Brent crude, the international benchmark, was trading 2.81 percent higher at \$33.98. Prices fell to 18-year lows last week as the market wallowed in oversupply arising from a price war between Saudi Arabia and Russia, which have ramped up production. "Prices recovered some of the early losses, as both Russia and Saudi Arabia suggested they would be willing to cut production but only if the rest of the world followed suit," ANZ Bank said in a note. "The

stumbling block appears to be the US, which is reluctant to join an agreement." But with US Energy Secretary Dan Brouillette holding talks with Saudi Arabia and Russia, "the market is hopeful of some sort of agreement", the bank added.

"Ultimately there is hope that cooler heads will prevail, and producers will reconcile and formulate a response that puts a floor under oil prices," said AxiCorp global market strategist Stephen Innes.

"Still, the challenge remains to the extent which producers are willing to cut." Last week, in response to a weeks-long market rout, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies including Russia, a group known as OPEC+, started talking about cutting production, but want other non-OPEC nations to participate, particularly the United States. "Without the US, no deal," one of the sources said. Two OPEC sources said tomorrow's meeting would be held by video conference at 1400 GMT.

The United States has not committed to taking part in any deal, which US President Donald Trump has said could take 10 percent to 15 percent of world supply off the market. US companies cannot coordinate production due to antitrust laws. The White House has said it was encouraging talks between the other countries, instead. Major US oil companies and industry groups are opposed to mandated cuts, which would be an extraordinary step in the United States.

On Friday, G20 energy ministers and members of some other international organizations will hold their own video conference, hosted by Saudi Arabia, a senior Russian source told Reuters. Efforts to get the United States involved in the production cut deal will be on the agenda, the source said.

Russia and Saudi Arabia have long been frustrated that curbs by OPEC and others have left a gap that has been filled by shale oil firms in the United States, which became the world's biggest producer. — Agencies

With oil industry in crisis, hedge funds sense turning point

LONDON: Hedge fund managers sensed oil prices were nearing a turning point last week, and for the first time in more than two months started to add long positions in anticipation prices would bounce from an unsustainable low. Overall, hedge funds and other money managers were still net sellers of 19 million barrels of petroleum in the six most important futures and options contracts in the week ending on March 31.

But they initiated 40 million barrels of new purchases as well as 59 million barrels of fresh sales, according to position records published by ICE Futures Europe and the US Commodity Futures Trading Commission. The number of new purchases was the highest since before Christmas and the first time any new long positions had been added on net since late January.

Portfolio managers added long positions mostly in crude with new longs initiated in NYMEX and ICE WTI (+33 million barrels) and to a lesser extent Brent (+8 million). With both WTI and Brent prices close to multi-decade lows, and wellhead prices in the oilfields of Texas even lower, close to their lowest levels for 40 years in real terms, prices began to look unsustainable.

Extreme high and low prices are dynamically unstable and never last for very long because they compel rapid and substantial adjustments in consumption and/or production. Extreme high prices in 2008, 2011 and 2018, and extreme lows in 1986, 1998 and 2008, lasted briefly in each case, usually just a few weeks or a couple of months. — Reuters

'What will I live on?': Crisis-hit Europeans seek aid

BERLIN: Thousands of self-employed people across Europe have found themselves without work from one day to the next as governments ordered shops shut, events cancelled and gatherings banned to stem contagion of the novel coronavirus. AFP has spoken to a cross-section of society hard hit by the ensuing economic crisis—some who have received much needed government aid, as well as others who are still waiting.

'What will I live on?'

German opera singer Anna Luise Oppelt was on tour when she received the bad news: all the concerts she had booked have been cancelled through April because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I was thinking: Oh God, I have nothing on, what would I live on in the next months?" the 35-year-old told AFP. With Easter round the corner, Oppelt's calendar had been packed with church concerts.

After learning about an economic aid package worth over a trillion euros (\$1.1 trillion) deployed by Chancellor Angela Merkel's government, Oppelt quickly sought help. She admitted suffering a few nerve-wrecking moments when she saw a queue of around 140,000 people ahead of her on her first try to fill in an online form seeking aid. "But I thought, they said there is enough to go around. It must work."

On Monday morning, it was finally her turn to fill in the online form, which she completed in 35 minutes. "On

Tuesday evening, I got an email confirmation and the money was already in my bank account," she said of the 5,000 euros that is to help tide her over for six months.

"It is great that they decided very, very quickly. It should be enough for half a year, it's small help but a good help."

'Germany is amazing'

Berlin-based Australian artist Anto Christ also saw her income stream dry up when Germany went into a lockdown. "I'm an artist everyday, but for money, I do workshops with children and I work at a club, I have a mini contract with them so they pay me a little bit, that's only 400 euros a month."



Cancelled shows are a disappointment for spectators but mean no money for food and rent for artists. Self-employed often slip through social safety nets and they are faring variably in this crisis. — AFP

"My bills and everything, that doesn't cover even that." After hearing about the aid scheme from a friend, she quickly applied. "Not only we got it approved in four days but we got it straight away," said the 34-year-old. "I think Germany is amazing."

'Counting on this'

Elsewhere in Europe, it was a more uncertain wait. Sara Matteuzzi who manages three AirBnB apartments in the center of Rome is now without income as tourists deserted the country that had become the epicenter of the pandemic. Three South Americans whom she employs to clean the apartments have also found themselves without work.

"I have asked for 600 euros in help from the state for self-employed workers," she said, explaining that she has "fees and rent to pay". Matteuzzi counted among the first to file her request with the National Institute of Social Security on April 1.

"They responded 24 hours later to say they'll give me a number for the process. But nothing more concrete. I'm really counting on this."

'Very complicated form'

Cecilia Gaspar, 52, a Peruvian national who cleans an office in Rome is now without work. She has sought food vouchers from the local authorities to be able to afford daily necessities, including for her daughter who has a newborn.

After filling in a "very complicated form", she was informed that she will receive a message on her phone detailing where she can get her voucher. "I am eligible because I've lost my cleaning jobs that help me to make ends meet," she said. But even that help won't arrive before April 9 — with no details thus far on how and where. — AFP

Business

US Fed launches program to support small business loans

Trump pats Fed for massive lending program

WASHINGTON, DC: US President Donald Trump said Monday he was satisfied with a program announced by the Federal Reserve to help facilitate the government's massive lending program for small businesses devastated by the coronavirus shutdowns.

"It's really been performing well," the president said during his daily coronavirus press briefing.

"As of today, tens of thousands of small businesses applied for more than \$40 billion in relief," he said, noting that the funds will "result in nearly two million jobs being preserved."

But Trump was not able to specify how much had already been paid out to businesses.

The Fed said it will essentially buy loans that banks make to small businesses under the Paycheck Protection Program launched Friday. That would leave the lenders with cash on hand to make other loans. The program offers \$350 billion in government-guaranteed financing through private lenders, which will be forgiven if businesses ranging from shops to restaurants use the funds largely to pay their workers.

The program, part of the \$2.2 trillion rescue package approved in late March, was rushed out by the Treasury and the Small Business Administration last week. Banks complained that they did not receive detailed guidance on how to manage the process while borrowers were left in limbo.

Trump has also said the government was ready to ask for more money if necessary.

White House economic advisor Larry Kudlow

said Monday there were 130,000 loans totaling \$38 billion from 2,400 lenders. But questions about the program have cropped up on everything from bank money laundering rules to how fast loans could be issued from lenders not previously part of SBA programs.

On top of that were nitty-gritty details about forms and documentation.

'Flawed launch'

Some businesses that applied for the financing said their applications were added to the pile, but with no word on how long they would wait. The Independent Community Bankers Association on Monday called the launch of the program "flawed" and cited a "lack of clear instructions" and "massive delays" in getting loans processed due to logjams at the SBA.

"Nearly 48 hours after the program went live, hundreds of lenders are still trying to get approval to access the SBA system so they can process loans," ICBA president Rebeca Romero Rainey

wrote in a letter to the agencies. She also called on the Fed to launch a secondary market for the loans—similar to what is done with home mortgages where loans are sold, getting them off the books of the original lender—and the Fed announcement on Monday does just that.

"To facilitate lending to small businesses via the Small Business Administration's Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), the Federal Reserve will establish a facility to provide term financing backed by PPP loans," the Fed said in a statement, adding that "additional details will be



announced this week."

Rainey also called for increased funding for the lending program, saying the \$349 billion "is frankly inadequate for the magnitude of need in the American small business community and is likely to run out quickly." The funds "will be depleted rapidly, and thousands of cash-starved small businesses who believe they were promised access to credit will be frustrated and angry," she said.

As early as Sunday, Wells Fargo—one of the largest banks in the US—announced that it had already exhausted the \$10 billion allocated to

the program. The bank is limited in the amount it can dispense because of mistakes made by past management.

Social media has become a dumping ground for entrepreneurs who are angry or disappointed that they did not receive the money right away. But there are also satisfied businesses, such as a coffee shop in North Carolina that was retweeted by the head of the Small Business Administration.

Kudlow downplayed the problems with the launch. "I know there are always a few glitches but I'd give it an A," he said. —AFP



Bankers Assn says program flawed

Italy injects record 400bn euros into virus-hit economy

ROME: Italy on Monday unveiled a record 400 billion euro (\$430 billion) stimulus to help businesses hurt by a month-long national lockdown that is like to run on for many more weeks.

Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte told the nation to be patient in the face of a pandemic that has now officially claimed 16,523 lives in the Mediterranean country and left millions at least temporarily unemployed.

"We will soon see a new spring for Italy but for the moment we must stay at home," the Italian leader said in a television address. The program will add to the 340 billion euros in government-backed loans announced last month.

Conte said it represented "the most powerful intervention in the country's history".

Half of the new package will be earmarked for export-oriented companies whose turnover has imploded over the past month. Italy's health "emergency is also an economic and social one," Conte said.

The government also announced that it will take steps to protect Italian companies weakened by the economic crisis from being taken over by foreign competitors. "This moment of difficult will not translate into an opportunity to prey on Italian companies," cabinet undersecretary Riccardo Fraccaro said.

Toll shoots back up

Italy has seen its novel coronavirus infection rates subside over the past few weeks and its death toll slowly level off. But the number of fatalities shot back up on Monday from its lowest level in more than two weeks.

The civil protection service said the daily number of official COVID-19 deaths rose to 636 on Monday from 525 the day before.

Sunday's toll was the lowest since March 19. It also represented a drop of 23 percent from the 681 deaths reported on Saturday. Italy's leading health officials had called Sunday's drop an important data point that could potentially lead to an easing of the country's strict month-long lockdown.

But civil protection service chief Angelo Borrelli said Monday that the data were still being carefully assessed and that any definitive ruling was premature. "The technical-scientific committee is currently carrying out its evaluations. Then, it will be up to the political decision makers," Borrelli told reporters.

He said the scientists will draw their conclusions about how to proceed "in due time". —AFP

Airbnb gets \$1bn investment for recovery

SAN FRANCISCO: Airbnb on Monday announced it was taking a billion dollars in new investment to endure and, it hopes, thrive in a trav-

African bank chief accused of violations

ABIDJAN: The head of the African Development Bank, Akinwumi Adesina, has been accused by bank staff of multiple abuses and breaches of the bank's code of ethics, charges he flatly denied Monday.

A group of anonymous "concerned staff members of the AfDB" wrote to bank governors to detail "cases of alleged breach" of conduct by the president, who is seeking a second term in May.

The staff said they had initially followed established policies within the bank to voice their concerns but in early March "came to the conclusion that the Ethics Committee was unable or unwilling to proceed with their preliminary examination of the complaint."

Their allegations, first reported on by the French daily Le Monde, include "various cases of alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct: unethical conduct, private gain, impediment to efficiency, preferential treatment, adversely affecting confidence in the

integrity of the Bank and involvement in political activity." The bank staff added: "It looks as if a conscious effort is done by some staff members close to the President to sabotage all attempts by the Ethics Committee to perform its duties."

'Blatantly false'

Adesina, 60, replied Monday without referring in detail to the allegations, which he termed "spurious and unfounded" and "blatantly false". The AfDB president added that the board of directors' ethics committee was carrying out an internal review that should proceed "without interference from anyone or the media."

Adesina, a former Nigerian agriculture minister, has appeared to be almost certain to be named to a second five-year term as head of Africa's foremost development finance institution.

In the letter, more than a dozen pages long and dated April 2020, bank staff also complained of "preferential treatment for Nigeria and Nigerians". They said in particular that while Nigeria owned a little more than nine percent of the shares in AfDB, Nigerians "made up roughly 25 percent of the newly recruited managerial functions" under a "massive recruitment drive that was launched

As COVID-19 hits tourism, Wizz Air finds new role

BUDAPEST: Hungarian low-cost airline Wizz Air is repatriating citizens and transporting medical equipment for east European governments, in a move coupling one-off charter traffic with savvy government relations amid the coronavirus crisis. Wizz Air is one of several airlines involved in the largest peacetime repatriation effort in Europe as travel firms turn their attention from tourists to serving governments.

"We try to do the right thing," Wizz Air Chief Executive Jozsef Varadi told Reuters. "Yes, governments and other institutions pay for the flights, but this is not the time to make a profit ... The most important issue here is to help." Wizz has operated two repatriation flights from the United States to Hungary, with the Budapest government picking up the tab and securing onboard meals.

The airline charged the government

for a charter flight, a lump sum which it declined to disclose. The government then advertised one-way tickets to Budapest for \$880 on the Los Angeles consulate Facebook page. A Wizz Air spokeswoman said that US regulations precluded passengers from picking up the bill, as the flights counted as non-commercial, humanitarian missions.

"US authorities gave us the green light to operate on the basis that we do not charge passengers," she said. "Otherwise we would not get permits. And this is what we strictly kept to."

A government spokesman said passengers did eventually pay for the flight. "The Hungarian citizens paid below-market prices through the foreign missions, with the Hungarian state paying for the rest. The repatriating flights were a Hungarian government mission, therefore the passengers had no payment obligation to Wizz Air," the Foreign Ministry said. Wizz has also operated flights for other governments in the region, including those of Slovenia and Macedonia, and is in talks with others. The carrier is deploying 10 percent of its fleet and 200 staff in the effort, which included its first



The head of the African Development Bank, Akinwumi Adesina, has been accused by bank staff of multiple abuses and breaches of the bank's code of ethics, charges he flatly denied on Monday. —Reuters

due to the restructuring of President Adesina between 2016 and 2018."

The new managers allegedly include a brother-in-law of the president and a childhood friend. Adesina said: "I am 100 percent confident that due process and transparency, based on facts and evidence, will indicate that these are all nothing more than spurious and unfounded allegations."

Another example raised by the

bank staff was that of awards received by Adesina in 2017 and 2019 of \$250,000 and \$500,000 from groups in the United States and South Korea.

"It is not clear if he received these awards as the President of the AfDB or as a private citizen," but "dozens of people, bank staff, executive directors" and others including family members "attended the award ceremonies at the bank's costs." —AFP



ever transatlantic flights as Airbus jets acquired to serve Europe's tourist boom zig-zagged across the United States and stopped in Iceland for fuel.

Hungary's nationalist government has given Wizz Air ample publicity for the repatriation, featuring the airline in videos and media appearances and infusing it with patriotic appeals.

"Home is here," Foreign Minister

Peter Szigjarto posted on Facebook alongside a video of the repatriation of hundreds of people from the United States, showing Wizz planes against the setting sun with a soundtrack of romantic music. As a six-plane Wizz fleet flew back from China, Szigjarto met with Varadi and told the businessman: "You play a key role here ... in more ways than one." —Reuters

el world transformed by the coronavirus pandemic. Silver Lake and Sixth Street Partners will invest the money into the home-sharing platform in the form of debt and equity, according to Airbnb.

"While the current environment is clearly a difficult one for the hospitality industry, the desire to travel and have authentic experiences is fundamental and enduring," Silver Lake managing partner Egon Durban said in a release. "Airbnb's diverse, global, and resilient business model is

particularly well suited to prosper as the world inevitably recovers and we all get back out to experience it."

The fresh resources will enable the San Francisco-based company to invest in its community of "hosts" as well as local experiences provided along with stays in homes, according to Airbnb co-founder and chief Brian Chesky. Airbnb said it will focus particularly on long-term stays, from students needing housing to remote workers, building on a rising demand the platform

has seen as people self-isolate during the pandemic. Terms of the investment include putting \$5 million into a Superhost Relief Fund for established, highly-rated hosts who need help with rent or mortgage payments due to the coronavirus's devastating effects.

Airbnb employees started the fund with a million dollars, and the two co-founders contributed another \$9 million, according to the company. Airbnb is also helping hosts with financial losses after guests cancelled travel plans. —AFP

Business

Australia's CB warns of 'very large' GDP slump, keeps record low rates

RBA keeps cash rate at 0.25%, unemployment to rise sharply

SYDNEY: Australia's central bank kept rates at record lows yesterday and pledged to keep three-year government bond yields at its 0.25 percent target as it predicted the coronavirus pandemic would trigger a massive economic decline.

The Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) on March 19 announced an out-of-cycle rate cut to 0.25 percent together with an unprecedented stimulus package, which included an unlimited quantitative easing program. On Tuesday, the board affirmed all the elements of that package and said it would not raise interest rates until it made progress in achieving its employment and inflation goals.

The decision comes as economists predict the worst recession in Australia's history that would see the unemployment rate almost doubling to near 10 percent. Economic indicators on Tuesday offered a foretaste of the pain to come with March job vacancies posting their largest drop in more than a decade.

"There is considerable uncertainty about the near-term outlook for the Australian economy," RBA Governor Philip Lowe said in a short post-meeting statement. "Much will depend on the success of the efforts to contain the virus and how long the social distancing measures need to remain in place," Lowe added.

"A very large economic contraction is, however, expected to be recorded in the June quarter and the unemployment rate is expected to increase to its highest level for many years."

Restrictions on people movement and gather-

ings have forced many businesses in hospitality, retail, transport, education and even community services to shut down. Businesses that remain open face falling sales and increasing operational restrictions.

Ominous numbers

There is already growing evidence of a marked slowdown in activity as the total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Australia creeps towards 6,000 with 46 deaths. A closely watched ANZ survey yesterday showed total job advertisements dived 10.3 percent in March from February, the steepest decline since January 2009 when the global financial crisis was raging.

Separately, a service sector index showed activity shrank for a fourth straight month in March as it plunged to the lowest in 11 years. It wasn't all gloom with another survey from ANZ and Roy Morgan yesterday showing consumer sentiment bouncing last week after two months of drastic falls, as a government "JobKeeper" plan to subsidize some workers lightened the mood just a little.

In anticipation of a steep contraction in gross domestic product, the RBA has so far bought A\$38 billion of Australian government bonds, or nearly 7 percent of outstanding stock, to help keep borrowing costs low. It said the functioning of the bond market has improved since it launched its quantitative easing program on March 20 and so it was likely that "smaller and less frequent purchas-

Job ads drop 10.3% in March



SYDNEY: Australia's central bank kept rates at record lows yesterday and pledged to keep three-year government bond yields at its 0.25 percent target as it predicted the coronavirus pandemic would trigger a massive economic decline.

es" would be required.

That remark led to a sell-off in long-term bonds, sending 10-year yields to a 10-day top of 0.951 percent. The Australian dollar also spiked to a one-week high of \$0.6168.

"That extremely aggressive pace of (bond) purchases can't be sustained for long," said Marcel Thieli at Capital Economics. "A case could still

be made for corporate bond purchases as spreads have continued to widen." Thieli expects the unemployment rate to surge to 12 percent and underlying inflation to fall below 1 percent over the next couple of years. "To meet its targets, the Bank may therefore have to launch negative interest rates at some point even though it currently has no appetite to do so," he added. —Reuters

IMF Blog

An early view of economic impact of the pandemic

By John Bluedorn, Gita Gopinath, Damiano Sandri

The COVID-19 pandemic has pushed the world into a recession. For 2020 it will be worse than the global financial crisis. The economic damage is mounting across all countries, tracking the sharp rise in new infections and containment measures put in place by governments.

China was the first country to experience the full force of the disease, with confirmed active cases at over 60,000 by mid-February. European countries such as Italy, Spain, and France are now in acute phases of the epidemic, followed by the United States where the number of active cases is growing rapidly. In many emerging market and developing economies, the epidemic appears to be just beginning.

In Italy, the first country in Europe to be severely hit, the government imposed a national lockdown on March 9 to contain the spread of the virus. As a result, attendance in public places and electricity use have declined dramatically, especially in the northern regions where infection rates have been considerably higher.

The economic consequences of the pandemic are already impacting the United States with unprecedented speed and severity. In the last two weeks in March almost 10 million people applied for unemployment benefits. Such a sharp and staggering increase has never been seen before, not even at the peak of the global financial crisis in 2009.

Disruptions caused by the virus are starting to ripple through emerging markets. After showing little movement early in the year, the latest indices from purchasing manager surveys (PMIs) are pointing to sharp slowdowns in manufacturing output in many countries, reflecting drops in external demand and growing expectations of declining domestic demand. On a positive note, China is seeing a modest improvement in its PMI after sharp declines early in the year, despite weak external demand.

The modest improvement in economic activity in China is reflected also in daily satellite data on

nitrogen dioxide concentrations in the local atmosphere—a proxy for industrial and transport activity (but also the density of pollution as a by-product of fossil fuel consumption). After a steep decline from January to February during the acute phase of the pandemic, concentrations have increased as new infections have fallen, allowing China to gradually relax its strict containment measures.

The recovery in China, albeit limited, is encouraging, suggesting that containment measures can succeed in controlling the epidemic and pave the way for a resumption of economic activity. But there is huge uncertainty about the future path of the pandemic and a resurgence of its spread in China and other countries cannot be ruled out.

To overcome this pandemic, we need a global, coordinated health and economic policy effort. The IMF—in collaboration with other partners—is doing everything it can to ensure rapid support is available to impacted countries through emergency financing, policy advice, and technical assistance.

We will have more details on the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic when the IMF releases its World Economic Outlook on April 14. Note: John Bluedorn is a Deputy Division Chief on the World Economic Outlook in the IMF's Research Department. Previously, he has been a senior economist in the Research Department's Structural Reforms Unit, a member of the IMF's euro area team in the European Department and worked on the World Economic Outlook as an economist, contributing to a number of chapters.

Gita Gopinath is the Economic Counsellor and Director of the Research Department at the International Monetary Fund (IMF). She is on leave of public service from Harvard University's Economics department where she is the John Zwaanstra Professor of International Studies and of Economics. Gopinath's research, which focuses on International Finance and Macroeconomics, has been published in many top economics journals. She has authored numerous research articles on



John Bluedorn



Gita Gopinath



Damiano Sandri

Trump announces 3M deal for millions of masks

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump on Monday announced a deal with US manufacturing giant 3M to provide millions of facemasks to combat the coronavirus pandemic after a dispute over foreign distribution.

"We have reached a very amicable agreement with 3M for the delivery of an additional 55.5 million high quality facemasks each month," he said. "We're going to be getting over the next couple of months 166.5 million masks for our frontline healthcare workers, so the 3M saga ends very happily."

Trump last week attacked the US company for not shifting all distribution back home and invoked the Korean War-era Defense Production Act against the company.

Some critics accused 3M of unpatriotic behavior because it continued to sell N95 respirator masks to other countries.

"We share the same goals of providing much-needed respirators to Americans across our country," said 3M chairman Mike Roman. "Given the reality that demand for respirators outpaces supply, we are working around the clock to further expand our capacity."

Overburdened US health facilities have warned protective equipment stockpiles are at critically low levels and some may run out within days.

Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau had pushed back against Trump's pressure on 3M, saying it would be a mistake to reduce cross-border trade in medical goods during the crisis. The company said it would continue to sell masks to Canada and Latin America. —AFP

The dollar is still king, even as virus slams US

NEW YORK: The coronavirus outbreak in the United States has caused millions of people to lose their jobs and brought the economy to its knees but it has not dethroned the American dollar.

To the contrary, the currency has risen in value this year, gaining six percent from its lowest point reached in early March, according to the US dollar Index, which measure's the greenback's value against a basket of other currencies.

The dollar's rise is primarily due to its privileged position as the world's reserve currency. That means that in times of crisis investors want to put their money in safe havens, even if the US economy is in trouble as well. Calling it "the exorbitant privilege of the dollar," Kit Juckes, global head of foreign exchange strategy at Societe Generale said, "Lots of people want dol-

lars all the time."

Unlike other currencies, "you find that you can print a lot of dollars without the dollar necessarily weakening dramatically," he said. That is the US Federal Reserve's move in recent weeks to pump multiple trillions of dollars in liquidity into the financial system have not weakened the value of the currency. "The demand for safety in this climate is outpacing what the Fed has done," said Joe Manimbo of Western Union.

Another reason for the dollar's appeal is the pressing need for cash by companies who have seen the crisis sap their revenues.

Reshuffle the cards

The currency is also the most traded in the world on the foreign exchange market, and the Fed announced last month that it would facilitate currency swaps with several other central banks so they could increase their dollar reserves.

Demand for greenbacks is particularly high in emerging markets saddled with dollar-denominated debt, Juckes said, but, "Not all of them can get themselves out of trouble easily."

Against the euro, the dollar has risen by 3.5

percent since January 1. And collapsing oil prices have helped the dollar appreciate against the Russian ruble, Canadian dollar and Norwegian krone, economies all deeply reliant on petroleum. The US dollar already was already highly valued thanks to the health of the economy—to the annoyance of President Donald Trump, since a strong currency also makes American exports more expensive against competitors.

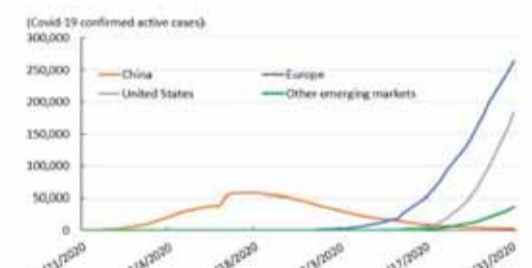
Trump felt that made it more difficult for US firms compete with China as the two countries fought a trade war, and he relentlessly called on the Federal Reserve to cut the benchmark interest rate.

With the onset of the crisis and the shutdown of huge portions of the economy, the Fed last month cut the rate to zero. Some observers believe the upheavals caused by the coronavirus could reshuffle the cards dealt to the world's two largest economies and jeopardize the dollar's position.

"The supremacy of the greenback will come into question in the weeks ahead," said BK Asset Management's Kathy Lien. Investors have been betting that the global recession will be deeper

Rapid spread

The coronavirus, first reported in China, is spreading quickly to other countries.



Sources: Haver Analytics and Johns Hopkins University
Note: Europe includes France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom. "Other emerging markets" includes Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Indonesia, India, Malaysia, Mexico, Philippines, Pakistan, Russia, South Africa, Thailand, and Turkey

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Damiano Sandri is a Deputy Division Chief in the World Economic Studies Division in the IMF's Research Department. Previously, he worked as senior economist on Brazil and joined various IMF missions to European countries. His research has been featured in top academic journals and various IMF publications. He is a CEPR Research Fellow and associate editor of the IMF Economic Review. He holds a PhD in Economics from the Johns Hopkins University.



than the US downturn, and that other countries won't emerge as quickly as the US.

"While that may be true, we've seen data turn south for many countries weeks ago. In the US, we're only beginning to see the COVID-19 impact on national data and in some cases, the numbers are still dated," Lien said. While a jobless report for March saw unemployment tick up to 4.4 percent, that data does not capture all of the jobs destroyed in the month.

Weekly data released showed an alarming 10 million people applied for unemployment benefits in the second half of March, as the pandemic slammed the US. —AFP

Pregnancy in the time of pandemic

MADRID: Pregnant with twins, Ainhoa Martinez knows she probably should be home being careful rather than putting herself at risk by serving the public every day at her boutique teashop near Madrid.

With all but food shops shuttered for the past three weeks as Spain seeks to curb the spread of the virus that has claimed over 13,000 lives, this 36-year-old says she has no choice or they'll have no money. But what really freaks her out is the thought of going for her 20-week scan at a hospital overwhelmed with coronavirus cases.

"They said the 20-week scan is very, very important and it's my first pregnancy, but I don't want to put myself at risk," she told AFP.

"What if I go with my husband and the police stop us? Not only are you taking up the time of a policeman who should be dealing with the outbreak, but you don't know whether he himself is infected," she said. In Spain, police are quick to fine anyone violating the terms of the lockdown under which people can only leave home for food, medicine or a medical emergency.

For expectant mothers across the world, the deadly pandemic has caused a huge spike in stress and anxiety, compounded by a multi-national lockdown that has played havoc with birth plans and raised countless questions few can answer.

"It shouldn't be scary to go and have a scan done, it should be exciting," says Sophie Hales, a first-time mum who just had her 20-week scan at a hospital in Luton near London.

Even though British hospitals are not yet under the same pressure as those in Spain, the atmosphere at the ultrasound clinic was tense, the experience "daunting". "Going on your own, especially to a place where you don't know if you're in a room with people that could be carriers of this virus and knowing full well you've got a little baby growing inside you—it's very, very unnerving," said Hales, 25.

"For me, it would be very terrifying if I was to be confirmed positive because you want to be as strong, as healthy as you can when you're carrying a child."

Nightmare turned reality

For Vanesa Muro it was a nightmare that came true just days before she was to give birth at a hospital in Madrid, Spain's worst-hit region where more than 5,000 have now died and hospitals are on the brink of collapse. "It was really frightening thinking about whether I could have it passed on to my baby," she said, describing how her husband rushed her to A&E but was not allowed to stay.

"They wanted the baby out as quickly as possible to see if he'd been infected so they decided to do it then and there," she said. Operated on by medics cocooned in protective suits, she gave birth alone to a healthy boy, with tests showing he was virus-free.

The World Health Organization says there's no scientific evidence showing pregnant women face a higher risk of infection than others. But it also says it is unknown whether a mother can pass COVID-19 to her baby, although so far they've found no trace of the virus in amniotic fluid or breast milk.

For these women, fear is a big factor, says midwife Maria Jesus Garcia Diaz, who works at a clinic in the Spanish capital. "What worries them is how the virus will affect them, but most of all whether it will affect their baby," she said.

"One of the most stressful things is uncertainty.. and uncertainty is difficult to alleviate."

In labor alone?

For some, uncertainty about the new social distancing rules is particularly acute, with Lumiere Nabab, a 29-year-old estate agent from Paris, worrying about going through labor alone. "It's stressful, we don't understand much, it's all very vague," she said.

"One minute they say the father can be with you, the next they say he must be in the next room during the delivery.. In some hospitals, the fathers aren't allowed in at all," she said. "The first time you go into labor, it's the unknown—you need reassurance and not to be left all on your own."

For Maria Rosa Marti, a 29-year-old radiologist from Barcelona who is expecting her second child this week, there are other concerns. With colleagues on the frontline, she is very aware of the huge pressure on intensive care units, which have been stretched to breaking point.

"What worries most is if there is any complication when I'm in labor and they can't take me into intensive care," she told AFP. "For me, a delivery with complications is the worst thing that could happen."

With pre-natal classes cancelled,



MADRID: This handout picture courtesy of the Carrillo Muro family dated March 13, 2020 shows newly born Oliver Carrillo at La Paz Hospital in Madrid. For 10 days after giving birth to her first child, Vanesa Muro was not allowed near him after she tested positive for coronavirus, for fear of infecting her newborn baby. — AFP

birth-plans ripped up and most checkups now handled by phone, it is the midwives who must help these women through this time of unprecedented upheaval. "We're seeing a lot of decisions taken as a result of fear and that's not good," says midwife Garcia Diaz, explaining it was crucial to

maintain perspective. "It is true that people are dying and sick.. but we can't deal with everything," she said. "Have a look at your situation and focus on what's around you. "What's important is to look after yourself and not to worry. And only watch a little bit of news." — AFP

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Hailey Bieber feels happier than she's felt 'in months'

The 23-year-old model has revealed she's relishing her time in quarantine with husband Justin Bieber, admitting the coronavirus pandemic has allowed the loved-up couple to spend some quality time together. During an Instagram Live Q&A, Hailey said she's recently learned to appreciate the "simple and small things in life that really do make me happy". The blonde beauty - who is currently with Justin in Canada - said: "I thought I was going to have a lot of anxiety through this process and there has been some. "But

it's also really shown me that the simplicity in life and kind of dialling everything back has made me so happy. "I've been happier than I felt in months just from being able to be low-key and just hang, and not have things on a schedule. I feel really reconnected with myself and that's unexpectedly made me really happy." Hailey and Justin are currently based at their 9,000 square-foot estate in Ontario. And the model admits they're in a fortunate position amid the pandemic. She shared: "We have a place out here and we're super lucky we have a lot of space to kind of

just walk around and move around." I swear I feel like I've gotten so much more done in this quarantine than I have in, like, a year." Asked what she's managed to do during the lockdown, Hailey explained: "Books I said I was going to read, shows I said I was going to get to, calls with people that I said I'd get to and make." It's like you have no choice but to get the things done that you put to the side."

Williams 'prayed' after developing coronavirus symptom



Robbie Williams got down on his knees and "prayed" after developing coronavirus symptoms. The 46-year-old singer was struck down with coronavirus symptoms while in quarantine after a cancelled gig in Australia, and Robbie has now admitted he was genuinely fearful for his life. He shared: "When I landed back in Los Angeles it was unusually cloudy and grey, and what with everything going on it did feel very apocalyptic. "I was in quarantine in an Airbnb down the road from my family and started worrying about food, about my medication running out ... and was just very fearful for a couple of days. "Then I could feel my body was getting lethargic and tired and heavy and I convinced myself I'd got coronavirus." Robbie subsequently decided to pray for his health and that of his family. And according to the 'Angels' hitmaker, he managed to

overcome his symptoms remarkably quickly. Robbie - who has been married to actress Ayda Field since 2010 - told The Sun on Sunday newspaper: "I never normally do it but I got down on my knees and prayed. I thought about my wife and family. "Within 30 seconds I had lifted my vibration and was in love. And you know what? The symptoms went away and the fear went away. "I've now safeguarded myself against lower energies, against feelings of worthlessness. I have to do this because I am a depressive. "If I don't keep myself safe then it's not a pleasant place to be. Please excuse my whimsy when I say isolation is easy - what I mean is that I am doing estimable things for myself where I raise my frequency and I don't give in to the temptations of those negative thoughts and feelings."



Dennis Quaid thinks quarantine is the 'best pre-marriage training'

The 65-year-old actor - who has previously been married to P. J. Soles, Meg Ryan and Kimberly Quaid - thinks social distancing is actually benefiting his relationship with Laura Savoie. Dennis told Us Weekly: "This [quarantine] is the best pre-marriage training you could possibly have." The actor and Lauren had planned to tie the knot on Saturday in Kauai, Hawaii. Dennis is understandably disappointed they've been forced to change their original plans due to the pandemic - but he revealed they're now playing things "by ear" when it comes to tying the knot. The Hollywood star added that self-isolating is "bringing us all closer together". Dennis previously revealed he's thinking about tying the knot "closer to home" once the pandemic has peaked. The actor - who popped the question to the PhD student in October last year - shared: "We postponed ... once we started to hear about [coronavirus in] Italy. "We have a few members of the family and friends who have low immune systems due to medical treatment, medical issues going on. We decided, 'Let's just postpone.' It was going to be nice and small. Now, we may do something closer to home. We're going to wait for this to lift." Laura also revealed she already had her dress flown over from Spain ahead of their intimate ceremony. She said: "The dress was already ordered and somehow it made it here from Spain." Meanwhile, Dennis previously insisted he isn't bothered by the 39-year age gap between himself and Laura. He said: "I didn't go out looking for an age gap or someone really younger than me. You have no control over who you fall in love with. I don't fall in love easy."

Victoria Beckham chats to NHS staff

Victoria Beckham was "humbled" to chat to NHS workers amidst the coronavirus pandemic. The 45-year-old fashion designer took to Instagram to share snippets of conversations she had had with doctors and nurses in Scotland as she praised them for "inspiring" so many people and urged everyone to stay home to help them. Taking to Instagram, she shared: "NHS FaceTime ... Yesterday I had the humbling opportunity to speak to an NHS team in Scotland. Please have a look and listen to what they are saying. They are so inspiring and we all need to do our part in staying home and helping

Theron finds method acting 'exhausting'



Charlize Theron says it is "exhausting" holding onto her characters. The 'Bombshell' star isn't a fan of method acting - where an actor takes on a character and continues portraying it, even when off set until filming is over - and says she is too "lazy" and busy to keep it up. Speaking about method acting, she said: "I go to my trailer. I take my make-up off and I go home. I don't know how people stay in ?character. I'm too lazy. I've got two kids to raise and I have dog s**t to pick up in the backyard. I don't know how you do that in ?character. It's exhausting. It's so exhausting. I learned pretty early on, the more I let go, the better - which, in the beginning, was harder for me - but now I'm very disciplined about it." However, Charlize does like to find a "very personal connection" with her characters and "understand" them as a person. She added: "I've built a career on playing people you don't like. For me, it's a very personal connection that I have to find with the person I'm playing. It has to make sense. I have to get to a place where I can say, 'This makes sense. This emotional human in front of me, I relate, I understand.'" The 44-year-old actress' key focus is her two children - August and Jackson - and her schedule is completely worked around them. She told the Daily Mirror newspaper: "I get up with them at 5.30am every day. I make them breakfast and pack their lunches. On weekends, we hang out with family and friends. I'll cook lasagne or steak."

Bloom asks people to stay home to help protect NHS

Orlando Bloom has urged people to stay home to help the NHS as he thanked the doctors and nurses for saving his life. The 'Pirates of the Caribbean' star - who hails from Canterbury, UK - recalled how his life was saved by the UK's National Health Service over two decades ago as he urged people to stay home to protect the country amidst the coronavirus. Alongside a blue heart emoji, he wrote on Instagram: "The NHS saved my life when I was 20 after I fell from a 3rd floor window and broke my back. "Having lived in the US for nearly 20 years now it's one of the public services from home I'll always respect the most (sic)" Orlando was filming 'Carnival Row' last month, when producers decided to pull the plug on filming as a "precautionary measure" because of COVID-19. He has now returned home "safely" after production was suspended on his show due to coronavirus. Taking to his Instagram stories at the time, he shared: "Hey guys, thank you all for your concern. Just to

be clear, our production of Carnival Row season 2 was suspended by Legendary and Amazon Prime Video as a wise precautionary measure due to the events unfolding globally regarding COVID-19. There have been no reported cases of COVID-19 on our set or on our production. I feel very grateful to have arrived safely home to my family. Be safe and wash your hands!" Orlando - whose fiancée Katy Perry is expecting a baby girl - previously revealed he was heading to the US to be "quarantined", after leaving Prague, where they were filming. He said: "It's farewell from us as we're going home to be quarantined ... We're coming home to the States, at least I'm coming home to the States because we want to get in before the quarantine. Big love everybody, stay safe out there. Self-quarantine. It seems really crazy actually this whole corona thing, but do the right thing by you and your family and stay safe. A few weeks, we'll beat this bad boy."



Lizzo sends meals to US hospitals staff fighting the COVID-19 on the frontline

Lizzo has been sending food to hospitals in the US for those working on the front lines during the COVID-19 pandemic. The 31-year-old Grammy-winner had lunch delivered to the ERs at the University of Washington and University of Minnesota on Monday, and the 'Truth Hurts' singer is planning on sending more packages to other hospitals. A representative for the 'Juice' hitmaker told The Seattle Times: "She sent several hospitals food that were hit really hard for staff working around the clock. "She is planning to send food to more hospitals as well." The kind gesture comes after the singer-and-flautist urged people to "let love spread" during the coronavirus crisis. The 'Good As Hell' hitmaker reminded her fans about how vital it is to adhere to social distancing guidelines to help slow the spread of the respiratory disease, but doesn't want the measures to "tear us apart" so stressed the importance of staying in touch with loved ones in the absence of being able to meet up in person. She said: "You cannot let this tear us apart. The social distancing is

something we are doing for our health, but we have to come together closer as a people. "Call a friend that you haven't spoken to in a while, call a family member. This is a very real pandemic. I know we watch TV and we see a lot of fear on television, but you can't let the fear spread faster than the virus. We have to let love spread. So that's what I've been practicing every single day." Lizzo recently had to defend herself for wearing a face mask. The 'Cuz I Love You' star explained that the reason she was wearing the protective gear - which has been in short supply during the COVID-19 battle - was because she was suffering from strep throat. She wrote on Instagram: "Got strep at the worst time ever. "It's nobody's business but I'd prefer y'all not criticize me for wearing a face mask and doing what I was supposed to do to protect the people in my home. "Please check yourself before you become an internet bully because you're bored. Get your facts straight. The world needs less trolls and more compassion. (sic)"—Bangshowbiz



these incredible workers and their colleagues on the frontline x VB (sic)" mlt comes after Victoria revealed she is donating 20 per cent of her fashion and beauty sales to support those on the front line amidst the coronavirus pandemic. She said in a statement: "We are committed to caring and supporting those on the front lines of the COVID-19 relief efforts - words can't describe how thankful we all are for the bravery and hard work of everyone who is making significant sacrifices to keep us safe. We are in this together. At Victoria Beckham and Victoria Beckham Beauty, we firmly believe that during these uncertain times, feeding yourself and your family should not be one of those uncertainties." Victoria will donate the money raised from sales on victoriabeckham.com and victoriabeckham-beauty.com to The Trussell Trust and Feeding America. Victoria's flagship store in London has had to temporarily close amidst UK government restrictions on what shops may open as part of strict lockdown measures but Victoria's online site is still going strong.



German sopraniist Lilli Wuensch sings in her bedroom as her giant schnauzer Ludwig yelps along, in Leipzig, eastern German.—AFP photos



German sopraniist Lilli Wuensch (right) and her husband Canadian bass baritone Randall Jakobsh at home.



German sopraniist and member of the ensemble of Leipzig's opera house (Oper Leipzig), Lilli Wuensch sings next to her husband Canadian bass baritone Randall Jakobsh at home.

Never mind wailing puppies, Leipzig opera musicians rehearse at home

By Ronny Hartmann

Singing operatic arias accompanied by the wailing of a Giant Schnauzer puppy is not easy, but Lilli Wuensch has had to get used to it. "When I sing high notes he starts to howl and cry," said the Leipzig Opera soloist about her puppy Ludwig — named after Ludwig van Beethoven. With the opera house closed for the last three weeks as Germany battles to contain the coronavirus pandemic, dozens of dancers, singers and instrumentalists are having to find creative ways to practice at home — while trying not to annoy their neighbors. Wuensch lives with her husband, also an opera singer, and their three children Leyla, 12, Joshua, 10, and Josephine, three. She is spending two hours a day at the piano learning notes, as well as cramming in an hour of exercise a day to stay in shape, while also having to cook and look after the children. "I'm on my own, with no coaching. It takes a lot of discipline," she said.

For ballet dancer Luke Francis, 25, the biggest challenge is space — and dealing with only 3-4 square meters to move around in. Using the doorframe and kitchen worktops to perform stretches has become part of the British dancer's daily routine. "I hold on to what I can to stretch," Francis said. "Normally it's the kitchen." The flooring has also been a challenge. "It's incredibly slippery, so that's definitely not easy." Training in bare feet



German musician Stephan Wuensch, principal cellist of the Musical Comedy of Leipzig Opera, plays the violoncello at home.

or a pair of old socks has now become the norm for Francis. Luckily, the dancer's apartment is on the ground floor so the neighbors have not been disturbed by all the jumping around. With online training every day from 11-12, the dancer still has a routine to keep to. "I also try to do some yoga-based stretching, as well as usual ballet stretching that I would do anyway," Francis said.

Cellist Stephan Wuensch, meanwhile, has been practicing for up to four hours a day, working on future repertoire in the opera house calendar as well as technical exercises. "Of course I have a lot of time to prac-

lice now," he said. The father of two, 53, is at home alone with his wife, a singing teacher, who conducts lessons online while he plays in another room. "I always make sure that the windows are closed so the neighbors can't hear anything," he said. For Wuensch, the hardest thing is not knowing when he will be able to make music with colleagues again. "As a musician you are used to having quite a social life — it is a relatively close relationship. That's difficult right now." —AFP



German musician Stephan Wuensch, principal cellist of the Musical Comedy of Leipzig Opera, plays the violoncello as children from the neighborhood listen.



British ballet dancer Luke Francis, member of Leipzig's opera house (Oper Leipzig) practices during an online training session at his rental apartment, where he stays confined due to the pandemic of the novel coronavirus in Leipzig.



US singer Gloria Estefan updates 80s hit for pandemic

Gloria Estefan, one of the biggest stars of the Miami music scene during the 1980s and 1990s, has updated her hit "Get On Your Feet" to raise awareness about how to stem infection from the coronavirus. Now titled "Put On Your Mask," the Cuban-American singer's message features a video showing Estefan facing up to the daily challenges of life during the pandemic, and urges listeners to wear a cloth mask in public to protect themselves from spreading or contracting the virus, which by Monday had killed more than 10,000 people in the United States. The video, released Sunday on the 62-year-old star's Instagram account, has been watched more than 80,000 times already.

"I wanted to contribute something that would put a bit of humor into a very serious situation because that's what has helped me get through the toughest moments in my life," Estefan wrote on Instagram. "I hope I make you smile while imparting an important message!" The singer and her music producer husband, Emilio Estefan, are influential leaders in the Florida business community, owning a number of restaurants and hotels in Miami and other cities.—AFP



In this file photo Gloria Estefan arrives for the 40th Annual Kennedy Center Honors in Washington, DC. — AFP

Czech TV to show virus lockdown sitcom

Czech Television said Monday it was planning to shoot a "Love in the Time of Corona" sitcom on the spread of the novel coronavirus and screen it by the end of April. "One house, three generations and a global pandemic," reads the trailer for the six-episode series on the public broadcaster's website. The show, an apparent paraphrase of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's novel "Love in the Time of Cholera", will be filmed in a Prague block of flats from April 14 and screened from April 27.

The characters are a teenager whose parents are locked down abroad, an old man who has to live on his own with his wife stuck outside their city and a young married couple whose relationship is put to an isolation test, Czech TV said. It called on viewers to send in anecdotes related to quarantine as the authors have the script only for the opening episode. "We only have one screenplay and we'll definitely need help," said producer Tomas Baldynsky. To comply with stringent security measures, the series will be recorded on robotic cameras and only the actors will be present on the site. The Czech Republic, which had declared 4,591 cases of the virus and 72 deaths by Monday morning, closed its borders last month as well as most shops and all pubs, cinemas, theatres and museums to combat the disease. —AFP

Johnny Clegg's family bars use of his music to lure sharks

Johnny Clegg's family has barred a South African shark cage-diving operator from using the late legendary singer's music to lure the predators for deep-sea viewing excursions, his manager said Monday. Raggy Charters had wanted to lower underwater speakers playing Cleggs's music to attract white sharks in the southern Algoa Bay to "give the whole operation an African touch," owner Lloyd Edwards told AFP. But Clegg's family said it "strongly" objected to the use of his music for shark cage diving because it would be contrary to his values. Clegg, popularly known as the "White Zulu", died in July last year, aged 66, after a long battle with cancer.

"Johnny would have hated to lure any kind of wildlife into any condition that wasn't natural," Clegg's manager Roddy Quin told AFP. "And if they were going to use his music to lure sharks into certain areas, he would have been very unhappy with that because he would never interfere with any kind of wildlife in their natural habitat whatsoever," Quin said. In an earlier statement he said Clegg, who defied apartheid with his unique fusion of African and Western culture and sounds, "would have been horrified to think his music would be used" in such a way.

Edwards told AFP that he respected the family's wishes and would use alternative music. "We thought we would give the whole thing a South African touch



Johnny Clegg

and flavour," Edwards said. Music is commonly used to bring sharks nearer to cages for tourists to have a closer look. Operators in Australia use music from heavy metal groups like AC/DC to lure sharks. Born in Britain, Clegg moved to Johannesburg with his mother when he was six years old. Exposure to migrant workers in adolescence introduced him to Zulu culture, dancing and music. His involvement with black musicians saw him frequently arrested and his work was repeatedly censored by the white-minority regime. Clegg's best-known track was arguably "Asimbonanga" (We Haven't Seen Him), written in 1987 for then imprisoned anti-apartheid fighter Nelson Mandela. —AFP

NIGERIAN ACTRESS CONVICTED OF FLOUTING VIRUS LOCKDOWN

A popular Nigerian actress was on Monday found guilty of breaking coronavirus lockdown restrictions in economic hub Lagos by throwing a birthday party, police said. Funke Akindele, a Nollywood film star popularly known as Jenifa, was arrested and pleaded guilty to hosting the bash for her husband and show business pals at their upscale residence on Saturday. "The court found them guilty as charged," police spokesman Bala Elkana said in a statement.

The statement said the couple were each sentenced to 14 days of community service and ordered to pay a fine of 100,000 naira

(\$260/240 euros). Elkana said they would also have to visit 10 "important public places" within the city of 20 million people to educate the public on the consequences of non-compliance with the restriction order. He said well-known singer Naira Marley, who also attended the party, had been arrested and would soon be charged. Akindele was in addition ordered to identify other guests for possible police action.

The party sparked angry reactions from Akindele's fans after she had earlier appeared in adverts calling for Nigerians to observe social distancing measures. The actress tendered an apology on her Instagram page on

Sunday. "I am sorry if I have misled you. I appreciate your concerns and I promise to always practice what I preach," she said. "I promise to always support the government in creating more awareness to eradicate this pandemic." There have so far been 232 confirmed infections and five deaths from the novel coronavirus in Africa's most populous nation. The authorities have introduced a raft of restrictions to curb the pandemic, including a two-week total lockdown in major cities Lagos and Abuja to tame the virus.—AFP



Funke Akindele

Mosque converted into mask factory in coronavirus-hit Iran



TEHRAN: Iranian women, members of paramilitary organization Basij, make facemasks and other protective items at a mosque in the capital on April 5, 2020. — AFP

TEHRAN: At a Tehran mosque converted into a factory, women volunteers who would normally attend to visitors to the old battlefields of the Iran-Iraq war have joined the fight against coronavirus. Lined up like factory workers, around 15 women have taken up positions in front of table-top sewing machines to produce face masks. But instead of overalls they are clad in black chadors, for they are members of the Basij, a volunteer militia loyal to Iran's Islamic establishment.

And in a sign of the times for Iran, one of the countries worst-hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, almost all of the women are wearing masks. "Our group used to go to the battlefields of the Iran-Iraq war every year to serve visitors," Fatemeh Saidi, a 27-year-old woman involved in the Basij with her husband, told AFP. The group of about 40 women travels annually to the battlefields of the 1980-1988 war that youths visit during the Persian New Year holidays as part of their education.

"This year, because of the spread of coronavirus, travel between cities was banned and we were not able to go there," said Saidi. "So we came here to serve our compatriots. We've been working on this for more than a month," she added. It's a task they see as their role in the national effort to

combat the COVID-19 pandemic, which has claimed more than 3,700 lives in Iran.

"Our situation is doubly difficult since we are facing both the sanctions and the coronavirus," President Hassan Rouhani said on Monday, referring to the punitive measures the US has reimposed on Iran since pulling out of a nuclear deal in 2018. The national and foreign media were invited to the Imamzadeh-Masum mosque in a southwestern district of the Iranian capital where the women have been working.

As the seamstresses stitch, a team is in charge of cutting out and sorting the masks, which are placed in buckets. Other women fold and arrange the printed sheets of material as they are produced. In another room of the place of worship, men sitting on prayer mats make plastic gloves with rudimentary heat-sealing devices. "We distribute these products to hospitals and deprived areas in Tehran and several other cities," Saidi explained.

One of the volunteers made no secret of the religious reasons for her contribution. For her, it was the same as "making the heart of Imam Zaman happy", another name for the Mahdi, the last of the 12 holy imams venerated by Shiite Islam in Iran. — AFP

British PM fights virus in ICU as...

Continued from Page 1

He had already spent a night in hospital after being admitted for tests on Sunday amid concerns that, 10 days since being diagnosed with COVID-19, he still had persistent symptoms including a cough and high temperature.

The 55-year-old is the most high-profile world leader to become infected with coronavirus, and his transfer to intensive care is unprecedented for a prime minister during a national emergency. Messages of support for Johnson flooded in from across Britain and the world. Cabinet minister Michael Gove said yesterday that the prime minister had been given "some oxygen support" but "he has not been on a ventilator" - although one is available if he needs it. In a round of broadcast interviews, Gove insisted the "work of government goes on".

But Britain does not have a formal constitutional role of deputy prime minister, and it is not clear that Raab himself has the power to take big decisions if required. Johnson tweeted from his hospital bed on Monday lunchtime, saying he was in "good spirits", and his spokesman said he remained in touch with his team. But his condition then rapidly went downhill, with Downing Street announcing that he had been moved to intensive care at about 7 pm (1800 GMT) in St Thomas' Hospital. At the time, he was said to be conscious.

The pandemic's relentless death march across the planet has already claimed more than 73,000 victims out of 1.32 million confirmed cases, with warnings that much worse is yet to come. A record new surge of 833 deaths in France and a jump in the Italian death toll on Monday doused tentative hopes of a beginning to the end of the agony in European hotspots. And the United States recorded 1,150 deaths over 24 hours, Johns Hopkins

University said.

However, glimmers of hope flickered in the daily diet of deadly statistics, with US President Donald Trump tweeting there was "light at the end of the tunnel". In New York state, the US epicenter of the crisis, the rate of growth in the death toll appeared to be slowing, although state Governor Andrew Cuomo warned that "now is not the time to be lax". "New York City is fighting back. We have an invisible enemy. We have a ferocious enemy. But this city is fighting back with everything we've got," said mayor Bill de Blasio.

In China, where the virus originated late last year, there were no new deaths reported for the first time. But amid fears of a second wave in Asia, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was expected to declare a state of emergency later yesterday as cases spike, especially in Tokyo. Singapore's usually bustling business district fell silent as most workplaces closed to stem the spread amid a new surge of cases in the city-state.

The virus is stretching medical facilities to the limit and the World Health Organization warned there was a global shortage of six million nurses. People around the world have been forced to improvise as supplies run short, with bodies packed in cardboard coffins in Ecuador and a mosque converted into a makeshift mask factory in Iran. Undertakers in New York are so overworked that a city official raised the possibility of carrying out temporary burials in a public park.

"Trenches will be dug for 10 caskets in a line. It will be done in a dignified, orderly and temporary manner. But it will be tough for NYers to take," tweeted Mark Levine. Funeral home director Pat Marmo from New York city said: "It's almost like 9/11, going on for days and days and days," referring to the terror attacks on the city in 2001.

As hospitals overflow, the Cathedral Church of St John the Divine in Manhattan is being converted to handle at least 200 patients beneath its stained-glass windows. "In earlier centuries, cathedrals were always used this way, like during the plague. So this is not outside the experience of being a cathedral, it is just new to us," cathedral dean

Clifton Daniel told the New York Times.

Governments around the world are scrambling to put together rescue packages to stem the economic damage from effectively shutting down global commerce, as fears loom of a devastating recession. Japan has promised a \$1-trillion stimulus package, nearly twice as large as measures taken during the 2008 financial crisis and a staggering 20 percent of GDP in the world's third-top economy.

With the ink barely dry on a \$2-trillion economic rescue package passed by Congress, Trump said he favored another massive spending program, again roughly \$2 trillion, but this time targeting infrastructure projects. "We built the greatest economy in the world. I'll do it a second time," he said.

EU finance ministers are expected to clinch a deal to use the eurozone's 410-billion-euro bailout fund to fight the virus but the bloc remains divided on pooling debt to issue "coronabonds". But France warned it was heading for its worst recession since World War II and German Chancellor Angela Merkel said the European Union was facing its "biggest test" since its founding in 1957.

Analysts at Oxford Economics said the pandemic "may trigger annual GDP declines among the worst seen in the last 100 years" with millions of jobs being shed around the world. However, stock markets chose to see the glass half-full on Monday, with the Dow Jones index soaring 1,600 points as traders saw hope the pandemic was reaching its apex.

And away from the multi-billion packages and Wall Street swings, the coronavirus is affecting millions of ordinary people trying to make ends meet. On a usually bustling wharf in Senegal's capital Dakar, 23-year-old fishmonger Galaye Sarr said his produce normally gets exported to Italy but trade has dried up. "The boats have been docked for a long time, all because of the coronavirus. And even if they go and catch fish, we can't sell it," he told AFP. "We're still trying to keep going, hoping that one day God will rid us of the curse." — Agencies

School closures have little impact...

Continued from Page 1

Health journal, said that as of March 18, some 107 countries had implemented national schools closures.

To analyze the potential impact, Viner's team reviewed 16 previous studies, including nine which looked at school closures during the 2003 outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome - a respiratory disease caused by a coronavirus similar to the one that causes COVID-19. Data from the SARS outbreak in China, Hong Kong and Singapore suggested school closures "did not contribute to control of the epidemic", they said in a summary of the review.

Experts not directly involved in the research said its findings were important and confirmed what many suspected: That the public health benefits of school closures were not proportionate to the social and economic costs for affected children and families. "This work suggests that ... schools could, and should, begin to reopen as soon as practicable after the initial wave of cases has passed through," said Robert Dingwall, a professor of sociology at Britain's Nottingham Trent University.

Viner said the findings suggest countries should now "ask hard questions about when and how to open schools". He said other measures, such as staggering school start and break times, closing school playgrounds and minimizing the movement of children between classes could be considered to reduce the risk of COVID-19 spreading.

Meanwhile, spring graduation ceremonies in Japan have been cancelled because of the coronavirus pandemic, but students at one school were able to attend remotely by controlling avatar robots while logged on at home. The robots, dubbed "Newme" by developer ANA Holdings, were dressed in graduation caps and gowns for the ceremony at the Business Breakthrough University in Tokyo.

The robots' "faces" were tablets that displayed the faces of the graduates, who logged on at home and controlled the robots via their laptops. One by one, the robots motored toward the podium to receive their diplomas. — Reuters

78 new coronavirus cases as Jleeb...

Continued from Page 1

Meanwhile, authorities surrounded Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and Mahboula, which were placed under lockdown yesterday to prevent a steep rise of coronavirus cases among expat workers. Hundreds of thousands of low-paid expats live in the two areas. Al-Qabas daily quoted official sources as saying the army was assigned to cordon off Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh, home to the largest concentration of Asian expats, while the police and National Guard are guarding Mahboula.

The government also extended a public holiday by two weeks until April 26 as precautionary measures against the coronavirus. It also extended the partial curfew by two hours in the morning to run from 5 pm until 6 am until further notice. The interior minister urged people to stay indoors even during non-curfew hours. "The decision to isolate (the two area areas) is in order to test everyone in there and treat them so it does not impact other areas," KUNA reported the interior minister as saying.

The manpower authority said yesterday a number of companies had shifted their workers from Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and Mahboula to new buildings in Jahra. Head of the authority Ahmad Al-Mousa said the authority will take immediate action against these companies by disconnecting power from the

buildings, besides taking other measures. He said the authority has obliged companies to provide essential medical items like masks, gloves and disinfectants to buildings housing 250 workers and more.

Saudi Arabia placed its capital Riyadh and other big cities under a 24-hour curfew on Monday, locking down much of the population as the largest Gulf Arab country expanded efforts to stem the spread of the new coronavirus. The new curfew applies to the cities of Riyadh, Tabuk, Dammam, Dahrn, Hofuf, and the provinces of Jeddah, Taif, Qatif and Khobar, a statement from the interior ministry said.

Entry to or exit from those areas will not be allowed, except for vital workers. Residents are allowed to leave their homes for medical or food needs inside their residential area and between 6 am and 3 pm only. Saudi Arabia reported four more deaths from the virus on Monday, bringing the total death toll there to 38. The government on Thursday imposed a 24-hour curfew in the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah. Saudi's eastern oil-producing province of Qatif, where the kingdom's first coronavirus cases were reported among Shiite pilgrims returning from Iran, has been on lockdown for four weeks.

Countries of the six-member Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have recorded almost 8,000 cases of infection and 60 deaths. The United Arab Emirates reported 277 new coronavirus cases, its biggest daily jump, and one new death. Dubai has also sealed off a densely populated neighborhood where many blue-collar workers live. In total, the UAE has recorded 2,076 coronavirus cases and 11

deaths. A ministry of health spokeswoman said the rise in case numbers in recent days was due to increased numbers of tests being carried out.

Meanwhile, human rights groups have called on the energy-rich Gulf states to release peaceful political activists from jail and scale back detention of migrant workers, to limit the spread of coronavirus. Hundreds of human rights defenders, peaceful activists and opposition members have been in jail for years in the six GCC states. The region, which takes in Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates, also detains thousands of expatriate workers for violating strict residency regulations.

"As the coronavirus pandemic rages on, Gulf states should take prompt measures to protect the health and rights of detainees and staff in immigration detention centers, including by releasing people and finding alternatives to detention," Human Rights Watch said yesterday. "Many migrant workers in the Gulf, especially those who are undocumented through no fault of their own or have fled unscrupulous employers, are in prolonged pre-deportation detention in overcrowded, unhygienic conditions," said its deputy Middle East director Michael Page.

Almost half of the GCC population of 52 million are expatriates, hailing mostly from South Asia, the Philippines or within the Arab world. As the pandemic spreads, Gulf states have adopted draconian measures. Saudi Arabia has imposed a 24-hour curfew on most of the country. Dubai too has rolled out a round-the-clock curfew while Kuwait has announced a lockdown on two areas densely populated with expats.

Some 8,400 coronavirus cases and 60 deaths have been reported in the GCC states. A majority of the cases in Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE are among foreigners. On April 1, Kuwait offered expat workers living illegally in the country a one-month amnesty to leave, with a free air ticket and without paying delay fines. Some 150,000 people are expected to benefit from the offer.

HRW said people in immigration detention in Gulf states pending deportation should be given non-custodial alternatives due to the health risks and global travel restrictions. The New York-based watchdog also urged Gulf governments to consider extending visas to ensure that expats retain their legal residency at a time when they cannot travel home freely. Overcrowding is a serious and recurring problem in many of the Gulf states' prisons and detention centers, it said.

A group of 20 human rights organizations, including Amnesty International and HRW, have urged Bahrain to immediately release peaceful activists still behind bars. Last month, Bahrain freed 901 prisoners on "humanitarian grounds" and 585 others were given non-custodial sentences. The groups called for the release of opposition leaders, activists and journalists who remain behind bars. HRW has also called on UAE authorities to "unconditionally release people detained unlawfully, including those detained for peaceful dissent." Amnesty International and the Gulf Centre for Human Rights highlighted the plight of Ahmed Mansoor, a prominent human rights activist who has been held in solitary confinement for three years.

Daily SuDoku

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easy

Yesterday's Solution

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9	5	7	6	4	8	2	3	1

very hard

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Today you could look in the mirror and panic about your appearance, Aries. You might be feeling a little under the weather and look a little tired. Nonetheless, you probably look a lot better than you think you do. Don't fall into the trap of blowing every little flaw out of proportion. A little rest is probably all you need in order to look like yourself again.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Your desire to see a romantic partner could be very strong today, Libra. However, if you ask, you might be turned down. Don't jump to the conclusion that your friend doesn't want to see you. If he or she says there are responsibilities to attend to, believe it! You might have to wait until another day, but that's probably the worst that will happen. Have a little faith and hang in there!



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

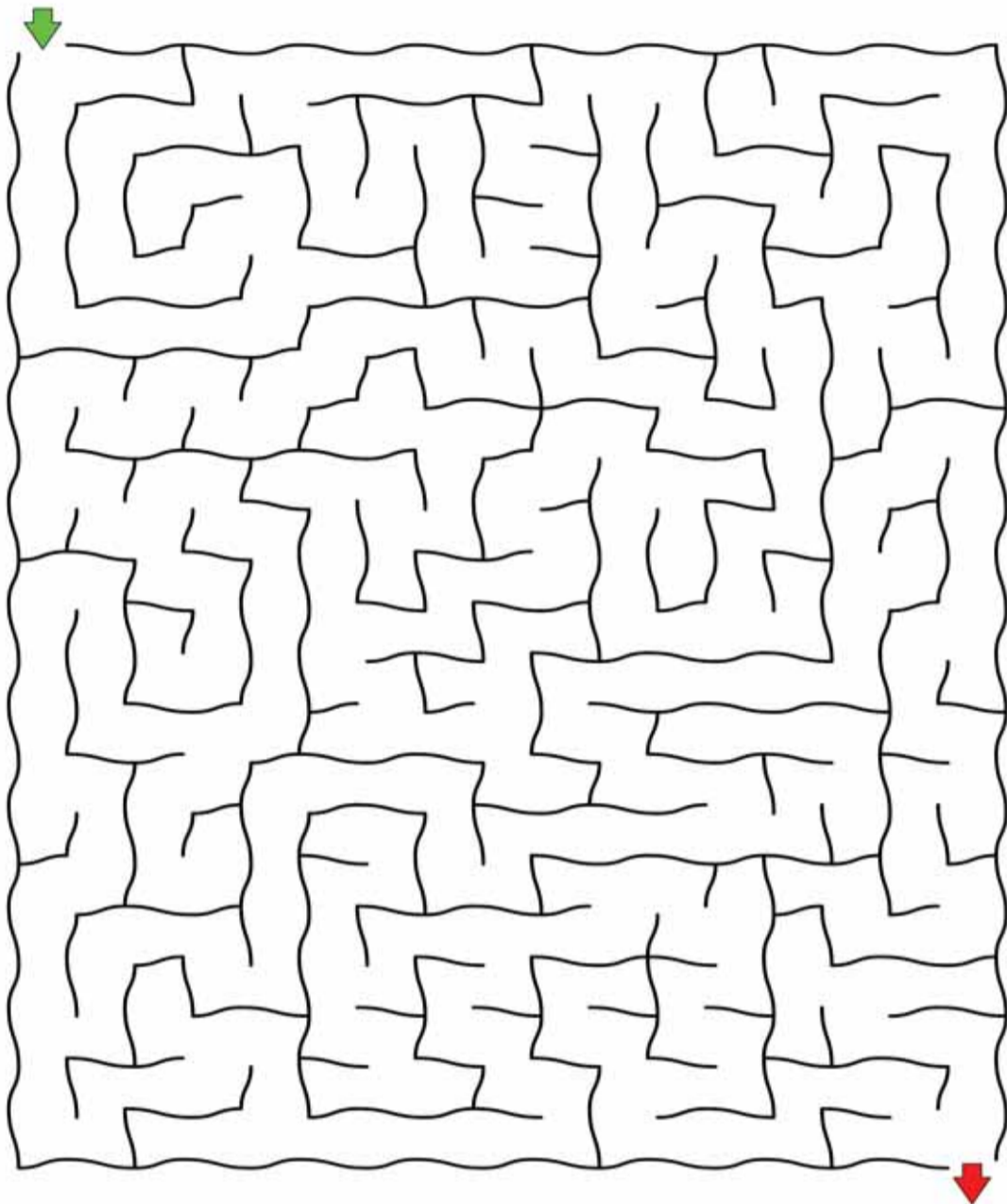
Your artistic abilities could seem a bit blocked today, Taurus. You could be anxious to complete a half-finished project, but at this point you may have no idea where to go with it. Don't panic! Do something else for a day or two and ideas will probably flow as if by magic. If you don't have a tight deadline, there's no rush to complete the work now. Give it some time!



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Overindulgence in food and drink over the past few days could be causing you to feel a little out of sorts today, Scorpio. You might even wonder if the fun was worth it! A little careful attention to yourself will have you back to normal in no time. Don't be surprised, however, if another opportunity to live it up presents itself! Take care. You don't want to feel this way again.

Find the way



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Today you could have a strong desire to get out and socialize, Gemini. You could well spend a lot of time on the phone trying to reach some friends, but not have much luck with it. If they're busy, a frustrating game of phone tag could result. You might try just dropping by. Even if he or she can't see you right then, you can make arrangements for later.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

A strong desire to meet with a romantic partner could come over you today, Sagittarius. However, you might not be able to reach your friend. He or she could be busy and unable to respond to phone messages or emails. Nonetheless, don't get too frustrated. If you persist, the two of you will eventually touch base. If you can't see each other today, make arrangements for tomorrow. Better late than never!



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Today you could receive an invitation to a social event that you'll really want to attend, Cancer. People could be there who might turn out to be important contacts. Nonetheless, you might find that other responsibilities interfere with your plans, and experience a wave of disappointment. If you're creative, you will find a way to fulfill your obligations and attend the event, too. Think about it!



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

A moody family member could have you confused, Capricorn, and you might not be able to discern the best way to find out what's bothering him or her. Don't over-analyze the situation. The best way is probably just to come right out and tactfully speak your mind. You'll probably find that this person simply has some minor problems to work through - nothing serious enough to worry about.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

An opportunity to travel to a place you've always wanted to visit, perhaps for business reasons, could come your way today, Leo. This could be very exciting, but you might have some difficulty making the arrangements. Flights could be full, hotels too costly, and responsibilities at home might need attention. But you can find a way to deal with any obstacle. Think creatively and get busy!



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

You might want to spend most of today outside, Aquarius, perhaps taking a walk through a park. You could have some serious thinking to do and feel the best recourse is to be by yourself for a while. Decisions won't come easily today, so don't try to force them. Just enjoy being out in the fresh air. Sometimes things come together more quickly if you forget about them for a while.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Daydreams full of adventure, perhaps involving travel, could take up a lot of your time today, Virgo. You're probably bored with your situation and longing to do something to break your routine. You might have no idea how you can escape from everything right now. Don't force it. Spend the afternoon in a place you don't usually visit. You'll come up with a workable idea in due time. Go for it!



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Money problems could be on your mind, Pisces, perhaps more so than necessary. You might have a tendency to blow them out of proportion and think they're worse than they are. Try to make a special effort to be objective. You might need to cut a few corners and devise a few temporary economy measures, but your situation should be back to normal within a week or two. Relax!

Color It



Sports

Photo of the Day



Michelle Parker flanks a turn in front of the Tetons in Jackson, Wyoming, USA. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

NZ Rugby criticises Crusaders players for lockdown breach

WELLINGTON: New Zealand Rugby condemned several Canterbury Crusaders players yesterday who were caught flouting strict lockdown rules by training together at a Christchurch park.

Five players from the Super Rugby champions, including All Black fly-half Richie Mo'unga, were photographed passing a ball and going through training drills together on Monday. The Crusaders admitted the players were from several households — which are supposed to remain separate under New Zealand's lockdown rules.

"Some of the Crusaders' players have not followed these rules and that is unacceptable," NZ Rugby chief executive Mark Robinson said. "We have reminded everyone involved in rugby that they must abide by the New Zealand government COVID-19 guidelines and this situation must not happen again."

However, it appears the players will not face further punishment, with Crusaders chief executive Colin Mansbridge saying their actions were not deliberate. He said players from separate households who lived close to the park happened to turn up at the park around the same time and began passing a ball around.

"It was clumsy and not wilful... we're not happy, they're not happy and they are contrite," he told Radio New Zealand. "We are sorry, it was something we did not envisage."

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern had some choice words this week for the minority of people who were not following rules during the South Pacific nation's four-week lockdown.

"While compliance has been generally strong, there are still some who I would charitably describe as idiots," she told reporters Monday. — AFP

Coronavirus not an opportunity for athletes to dope: WADA president

'Testing is not our only weapon and we have some strong ones'

LONDON: Athletes are fooling themselves if they think they can use the chaos caused globally by the coronavirus pandemic to cheat, World Anti-Doping Agency president Witold Banka has told AFP.

The Pole said physical testing might be virtually at a standstill but WADA and national anti-doping agencies possessed other weapons they can deploy in the fight against doping.

Canada and Russia have gone public in saying they have suspended their testing programmes while the British anti-doping body has significantly reduced its testing. "COVID-19 is not a space for the athletes to cheat," Banka said in a phone interview from his home in Poland.

"They should not feel it is a time for cheating. Otherwise, the anti-doping agencies will use their weapons to catch them." The 35-year-old former Polish sports minister, who only took up his post on January 1 after being elected to replace Craig Reedie, said he hoped it would not take long once the pandemic was over to return testing to its "full power".

In the meantime WADA would rely on other means to keep tabs on athletes. "Testing is not our only weapon and we

have some strong ones," Banka said. "There is the athlete biological passport, there is long-term analysis of samples, there is intelligence.

"The biological passport is a useful tool for the profile of the athletes. "Also they are still obliged to tell us of their whereabouts even if we cannot go and test them." Banka is mindful however that on a global basis, combating the coron-

“We are a strong organisation”

avirus is the number one priority.

"Anti-doping is not as important as people's lives," he said. The former international 400 metres runner said he had been in regular contact with leading sports bodies including the International Olympic Committee and the National Anti-Doping Organizations to discuss the current situation. "We issued guidelines

for them that cover a number of areas that may be affected by COVID-19."

'CAUSE FOR CONCERN'

The pandemic has forced Banka to put on hold several ideas he wants to implement, especially a bid to increase funding for the anti-doping fight.

"I am pursuing the idea of a Solidarity Fund to serve regions like Africa, for example, where they have very limited anti-doping systems (there is just one accredited laboratory in South Africa)," he said.

"We are still working on that, this is a very important issue." He aims to encourage sponsors and corporate partners to back the fight against doping with hard cash.

"The idea is to get them to contribute a minimum of their sponsorship investment in sport (to anti-doping efforts)." Such corporate involvement could go some way to resolving an age-old problem for WADA, and one Reedie frequently raised — that their budget is insufficient for the size of the task they face.

"We are a strong organisation with powerful tools," said Banka. "But taking into account our budget, \$36-40 million a year, that is not in line with the expecta-



Witold Banka

tions towards the organisation expressed by our stakeholders. We want, or rather have to, increase it.

"That is why we are looking for some alternative sources of funding." Banka said proudly that WADA "plays many roles" and achieves a lot even with the budget constraints but stresses that with extra funding "it could do a lot more".

"One aspect we would like to address is that at the 2016 Rio Games, 10 percent of the medalists came from countries who

either have very weak anti-doping systems or none at all," he said. "That is a cause for concern and one which we should have the capability to address."

"That would be possible if sponsors were willing to contribute to the Solidarity Fund," Banka said the coronavirus pandemic would not deter WADA from its over-riding goal. "This is a new world for all of us," he said. "WADA, though, will do everything to maintain the integrity and beautiful idea of clean sport." — AFP

Phelps urges athletes to seek help for stress

LOS ANGELES: US Olympic great Michael Phelps says it's "hard to comprehend" what today's athletes are going through with the Tokyo Games postponed in the face of the coronavirus pandemic.

"It's our life," Phelps said in an interview on NBC's Today show on Monday. "I've tried to replay what I would be going through emotionally at this very time if I was still competing."

"It's hard to really kind of comprehend it."

The International Olympic Committee took the historic decision to postpone the Tokyo Games by 12 months as Olympic hopefuls found it harder and harder to train with sports and facilities shut down by the pandemic.

Phelps, who retired after the 2016 Rio Olympics with a record 28 medals — 23 of them gold — said athletes must try to find positives in the delay.

"You go through something for four years. We kind of know exactly when it's going to come, and our bodies are ready for it, and then we have to wait," he said.

"The biggest thing now is everybody to look at this as an opportunity, an opportunity for another year, fine-tuning



Michael Phelps

some small things that are going to help you make a big difference."

Phelps, who has detailed his own battles with anxiety and depression, had already voiced concern that the stress of postponement could take a toll on the

mental health of athletes.

"If you are in a spot where you need help, to reach out and ask for help," Phelps said of the advice he is offering. "It was something that was very difficult for me to do." — AFP

France wants to replace Euro Cup with Club WCup

PARIS: Laporte wants World Rugby to create a Club World Cup to replace the European Champions Cup, he said in an interview published Monday.

"Let's be frank: it (the Champions Cup) does not generate enough income," Laporte told French rugby newspaper Midi Olympique.

Former France coach Laporte is running for the vice-presidency of World Rugby, the global governing body, with elections due on May 13.

"World Rugby must create a World Cup for professional clubs that would take place every year, outside the traditional Rugby World Cup windows," insisted Laporte.

He said the format would duplicate that of the World Cup, played every four years, with South Africa winning the 2019 edition in Japan.

"We can take as a basis for our work what currently exists at World Cup level: 20 teams divided into four pools of five and a final phase with quarter-final, semi-final and final matches," Laporte explained.

"The whole thing would have to be condensed into six weeks."

Laporte said he "can well imagine seeing the semi-finalists of the (French

Top 14, those of the English championship, the top six in Super Rugby, the top four in the Celtic league, the Japanese champion and the US champion, for example, qualifying".

"We have to create this competition and very quickly. It could be a breath of fresh air for the whole of world rugby," said Laporte, with Midi Olympique calculating it could bring in between 300-500 million euros (\$323-539m) per year.

Laporte, who coached Toulon to three Champions Cup titles, said the competition "would have to disappear, that's for sure, if we don't want to overload the calendar a bit more".

"This European competition is magnificent, with Toulon I've been able to lift the trophy three times and I know what it can represent," he said, before bemoaning its financial limitations.

"Without the Champions Cup, nine weekends will become available."

European Professional Club Rugby (EPCR), the Champions Cup organisers, responded Monday by saying they had already talked to their shareholders about a global event every four years that would "complement" their flagship tournament and the second-tier European Challenge Cup.

But with rugby worldwide suspended due to the coronavirus outbreak, EPCR added it "does not believe it appropriate to highlight such discussions while the public health crisis due to COVID-19 continues", insisting its "focus is on attempting to reschedule the knockout stages of the 2019/20 tournaments subject to government and local authority directives". — AFP

Sports

As Bundesliga clubs resume training, a debate over fairness and fitness

For players, self-discipline during lockdown will play a big role

BERLIN: With the top clubs in the Bundesliga already back in training, envious rivals across Europe are watching to see whether the Germans gain an edge or pay a price when play resumes. Europe's top leagues are desperate to return to competition to avert financial disaster due to the coronavirus pandemic, but if they move too fast they could risk injuring their players. Moving too slow also comes at a cost. In addition to the injury worry, when to resume training presents a problem of fairness, if some clubs can resume sooner than others it could distort competition and produce "crazy" results.

The issue has come up in Germany where, in line with an earlier recommendation by the German football league, Bundesliga leaders Bayern Munich and second-place Borussia Dortmund and a raft of other clubs resumed training in small groups on Monday. The Bundesliga hopes to return in early May, having ground to a halt in mid-March.

"We have to combine two central goals, namely to keep the players in a very good condition and at the same time avoid possible infections", Martin Przdionzio, the Paderborn sports director, told SID, AFP's German subsidiary.

RB Leipzig had continued with non-contact training throughout and Augsburg resumed on March 23. By Monday, only Freiburg and Werder Bremen of the Bundesliga clubs had not resumed. Werder Bremen coach Florian Kohfeldt, unable to train his squad because of local regulations, told SID he was worried about "distortion of competition".

In an interview published on Friday, Carlo An-

celotti, the veteran Italian manager, now in charge at Everton, emphasised that point. "One of the important things is that all the clubs resume training at the same time, that there are no disparities, that no one has an advantage over the others," the 60-year-old Italian told L'Equipe.

Coach Julian Nagelsmann of Dortmund is already putting his players through their paces. "My players haven't lost too much fitness," Nagelsmann said. "They'll be back in shape in a week and a half or two."

The question of how long players need to safely regain match fitness will face all of Europe's top clubs after the unprecedented mid-season interruption. "It depends on how long they are confined," Spanish coach Juanjo Del Ojo, a fitness trainer at Monaco in French Ligue 1, told AFP.

"If it lasts five or six weeks, we would need a minimum of three weeks before we can return to the competition with certainty and reduce the risk of injury," Xavier Frezza, an independent coach who works with French professional footballers, told AFP "players have never experienced this in their entire lives. A pro player only has a three- to four-week break in the summer, and many of them still do a few things," he added.

"Two months is going to be really weird for them." "Some studies have shown a correlation between the number of full training sessions before resuming competition and a reduction in injuries," he said.

For the players, self-discipline during the lockdown will play a big role. Those who have kept in shape and avoided weight gain will come back much better than those who have not. That explains why

“Crazy results if league resumes”



MUNICH: (L-R) Bayern Munich's Dutch striker Joshua Zirkzee, Bayern Munich's Canadian midfielder Alphonso Davies, Bayern Munich's Polish striker Robert Lewandowski and Bayern Munich's French defender Kingsley Coman attend a training session at the team's training area in Munich, southern Germany, yesterday. — AFP

Bayern Munich introduced compulsory group training by video conference from the first day of confinement, maintaining a rhythm and team peer pressure.

The risks are all the greater as any resumption will bear no resemblance to the pre-season, when the pace picks up gradually. The clubs will have to complete the high-pressure part of the season playing twice a week at home and in Europe.

This raises the question of whether clubs that start training first will have an advantage over those that have been confined for longer. "A week's difference,

when you don't even have three weeks of preparation, physically and technically it can make a big difference," said Frezza.

Former Borussia Dortmund captain Sebastian Kehl suspects some "crazy" results if and when the league resumes after the forced hiatus.

"My guess is that the results will be more unpredictable, there will be movement in the table with the odd surprise or two," the 40-year-old, part of Dortmund's management team, told Monday's edition of German magazine Kicker. — AFP

Guardiola's mother dies after contracting virus

LONDON: Pep Guardiola's 82-year-old mother has died after contracting coronavirus, Manchester City announced on Monday. "The Manchester City family are devastated to report the death today of Pep's mother Dolores Sala Carrio in Manresa, Barcelona, after contracting coronavirus," the Premier League club said in a statement.

"Everyone associated with the club sends their most heartfelt sympathy at this most distressing time to Pep, his family and all their friends," Guardiola, 49, last month donated one million euros (\$1 million) to buy medical supplies for the fight against the coronavirus pandemic in his native Spain.

He also issued a video as part of the club's Cityzens At Home initiative urging fans to stay at home. Spain declared Monday a fourth consecutive day of coronavirus-related deaths, with 637 over the past 24 hours, the lowest number in nearly two weeks. Fatalities, which were sharply down on the record 950 on Thursday, brought the total deaths in the country to 13,055, second only to Italy. — AFP

Buttler 'amazed' by success of WCup shirt auction

LOVDON: England wicketkeeper Jos Buttler says he is "amazed" at the response so far to an auction for his Cricket World Cup final shirt to raise money to fight the coronavirus.

Buttler's shirt, which he wore when completing the last-ball run-out that saw England beat New Zealand at Lord's last year, is being sold to raise money for two specialist heart and lung centres.

With a day left until the eBay auction closes at <https://bit.ly/JosShirtAuction>, it has already raised more than £65,000 (\$80,000).

"There's a day or so left on the auction as well so hopefully we can raise a bit more," Buttler said in a conference call on Monday. "It's a very special shirt but I think it takes on extra meaning with it being able to hopefully go to the emergency cause."

The 29-year-old said there was a personal link behind his decision to support the Royal Brompton and Harefield Hospitals Charity — his wife's aunt is head of paediatrics at the Royal Brompton in London.

The worldwide spread of COVID-19 has brought

cricket to a standstill, with the start of the English season delayed until at least May 28.

Lucrative tours to England by the West Indies, Pakistan and Australia are in doubt. England's centrally contracted players responded last week to the looming financial crisis facing the game by announcing an "initial donation" of £500,000 in support of the England and Wales Cricket Board and good causes. That is the equivalent to a 20 percent pay cut for three months. The players' decision followed the ECB's announcement of a £61 million aid package for the English game and a 25 percent pay for board chief executive Tom Harrison.

"Everybody is very aware of our duty as players to contribute where we can," said Buttler. The Lancashire player was asked if the cash should support the Hundred, due to be held for the first time this year, but he said the players wanted their money to go to grassroots' cricket.

"I think the Hundred's a big thing that may or may not happen this summer," he said. "It may get delayed. I know a lot of investment has gone into that."

"But as players we're all very aware of the other effects this is going to have drip-feeding down into the game. Without grassroots' cricket we're nothing really." He added: "So I know the players are very strong on wanting that money to help that grassroots' structure and pathway because we need to bring people into the game and make sure that is very strong." — AFP

Silver says no NBA decisions likely until May

LOS ANGELES: NBA Commissioner Adam Silver says he thinks it will be at least May before any decision can be made about resumption of the 2019-20 season that was shut down amid the coronavirus pandemic. "Essentially, what I've told my folks over the last week is that we just should just accept that, at least for the month of April, we won't be in a position to make any decisions," Silver said Monday in an interview that was live streamed on the NBA's Twitter account.

"And I don't think that necessarily means on May 1 we will be," he added. The NBA was the first major US pro sports league to halt games, shutting down the season on the night of March 11 after Utah Jazz center Rudy Gobert became the first NBA player to test positive for the virus.

The NBA regular season was set to end on April 15, with the playoffs due to start on April 18 heading toward the June NBA Finals.

With continuing uncertainty over how the virus will continue to spread and when it might be contained Silver said no decision had been made as to whether to try to complete the regular season or possibly go straight to the playoffs.

Nor has the league homed in on scenarios such as staging a tournament-style playoffs in a single location, in one recent report possibly Las Vegas.

"I don't want to leave the suggestion that we're not doing everything we possibly can to restart under the right circumstances," Silver said. He noted, however, that once play can resume, the options won't be unlimited. "I will say, as I look out into the summer there does come a point where we would start impacting next season," he said. Silver said the league was still considering resuming play without fans, whether in NBA arenas, at practice facilities or in a single site tournament-style playoffs.

One report suggested the league was considering Las Vegas for such a tournament.



ILLINOIS: File photo taken on February 14, 2020 NBA Commissioner Adam Silver speaks to the media during a press conference at the United Center in Chicago, Illinois. Yesterday, NBA Commissioner Adam Silver says he thinks it will be at least May before any decision can be made about resumption of the 2019-20 season that was shut down amid the coronavirus pandemic. — AFP

"There's been a lot of conjecture about various cities and places that might hold a tournament," he said. "We're in listening mode right now. We've been contacted by many of those jurisdictions to ask what our level of interest is."

"But there's just too much unknown right now. The health of everyone involved in the NBA has to come first," Silver said he didn't imagine when he made the call to shut down the league on March 11 that much of the United States would soon be under shelter-at-home orders as COVID-19 cases and deaths shot up in hubs including Seattle and New York. "There wasn't any of the widespread view that our country would in essence be entirely shut down over the next several weeks," he said.

"The fact is sitting here today, I know less, in a way, than I did then."

Silver noted that the NBA, and sports in general, were among the first US businesses to cease opera-

tions as health authorities counseled social distancing to slow the spread of the virus.

He said he told President Donald Trump, who held a conference call with Silver and other major US sports league leaders on Saturday, that he believed "all the leagues share this view that we would love to be part of the movement to restart the economy."

"Of course that can't come in a way that would compromise safety," he added.

While Silver remains concerned about the economic effect a more extended shut down will have on 55,000 people employed in the NBA — many of them on a game-day basis — he also said the increased use of technology for virtual meetings and such had led the league to explore "more virtual ways that people could experience the game."

"How can we now think about opportunities using this downtime to re-express this experience for our fans?" Silver said. — AFP

New bribe details on 2018, 22 WCup votes as execs charged

NEW YORK: Two former executives with US media giant Fox were charged with corruption, bank fraud and money-laundering on Monday as US federal prosecutors shed fresh light on the scandal-tainted bidding war for the 2018 and 2022 World Cups.

Former 21st Century Fox employees Hernan Lopez, 49, and Carlos Martinez, 41, face charges along with 65-year-old Gerard Romy, who worked for Spanish media conglomerate Imagina.

The three men are accused of paying millions in bribes to officials from CONMEBOL and CONCACAF, the governing bodies for football in South America and North America, Central America and the Caribbean.

The charges allege the bribes were paid in exchange for lucrative television rights contracts for regional competitions, the Copa America and qualifying games for the 2018 and 2022 World Cups.

The case forms part of the wide-ranging 2015 corruption scandal that left world governing body FIFA in turmoil and led to the downfall of president Sepp Blatter.

An unsealed superseding indictment released on Monday also detailed corruption surrounding the 2010 vote in Zurich which saw FIFA award the 2018 World Cup to Russia and the 2022 World Cup to Qatar.

The indictment said former Brazilian FIFA member Ricardo Teixeira and late Paraguayan official Nicolas Leoz, both members of the FIFA committee which voted on the 2018 and 2022 tournaments, received payment of bribes in exchange for voting for Qatar's bid.

In addition, Trinidad's long-serving FIFA official Jack Warner "was promised and received" bribe payments totalling \$5 million to vote for Russia while Guatemala's Rafael Salguero was promised a \$1 million bribe to vote for Russia.

Salguero pleaded guilty to multiple corruption charges in 2016 and was banned from FIFA while Warner, who faces charges in the United States, is currently battling extradition to the US from his native Trinidad.

"The profiteering and bribery in international soccer have been deep-seated and commonly known practices for decades," William F. Sweeney Jr, the assistant director in charge of the FBI's New York field office, said in a statement on Monday which announced the charges against Lopez, Martinez and Romy.

"Over a period of many years, the defendants and their co-conspirators corrupted the governance and business of international soccer with bribes and kickbacks, and engaged in criminal fraudulent schemes that caused significant harm to the sport of soccer."

"Their schemes included the use of shell companies, sham consulting contracts and other concealment methods to disguise the bribes and kickback payments and make them appear legitimate."

Since the FIFA scandal erupted in 2015, the US government has accused a total of 45 people and various sports companies of more than 90 crimes and of paying or accepting more than \$200 million in bribes.

Of the 45 accused, five have died. A total of 22 pleaded guilty, of which only six have been sentenced to date. A dozen remain in their home countries, where they face prosecution by local authorities or are free fighting extradition. — AFP

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Liverpool make U-turn over furlough

Ceferin says Liverpool should be awarded Premier League title



LIVERPOOL: File photo taken on January 16, 2007 The Liverpool football club emblem is pictured on a gate at the Anfield ground. Liverpool Football Club announced late on April 6, 2020, that they had reversed their earlier decision to place some non-playing staff on temporary leave during the COVID-19 pandemic, or 'Furlough' them. — AFP

LONDON: Liverpool were forced to apologise as the Premier League club ditched their controversial plan to furlough non-playing staff during the coronavirus on Monday, while FIFA urged players and clubs to reach agreement over wage reductions.

Liverpool faced stinging criticism from fans and former players after revealing over the weekend that they wanted to use the UK government's furlough scheme. Fenway Sports Group, Liverpool's US-based owners, wanted to put around 200 staff on enforced leave during the pandemic while the government paid 80 percent of their wages.

Fellow top-flight teams Tottenham, Newcastle, Bournemouth and Norwich have already furloughed staff, but it was table-toppers Liverpool — with pre-tax profits of £42 million (\$51.7 million) for the 2018-19 season — who came in for the most criticism, in part due to their reputation as a club with a strong bond to Merseyside's working-class community.

The fierce backlash sparked a sudden climbdown as Liverpool chief executive Peter Moore wrote an open letter to supporters announcing they would opt for "alternative means" to the furlough route after consulting "key stakeholders".

"We believe we came to the wrong conclusion last week to announce that we intended to apply to the Coronavirus Retention Scheme and furlough staff due to the suspension of the Premier League football calendar, and are truly sorry for that," wrote Moore.

Former Liverpool defender Jamie Carragher tweeted: "Well done @PeterMooreLFC @LFC a big mistake initially & thankfully now it's been put right."

With the Premier League postponed indefinitely because of the virus, Manchester City, bankrolled by Abu Dhabi's Sheikh Mansour, said they would not be using the government's job retention scheme, with Manchester United set to follow their example. Liverpool's U-turn came as England's top-flight teams, among the richest in the world, were under increasing scrutiny, with government ministers warning bosses and players they should "think carefully" over their next moves. The highest-paid Premier League players such as Manchester United goalkeeper David de Gea and Manchester City midfielder Kevin De



Bruyne command eye-watering salaries, reportedly nearing £20 million (\$25 million, 23 million euros) a year. FIFA on Monday urged clubs and players to reach agreement on taking wage reductions in order to protect clubs who are suffering financial damage, sources at world football's governing body said.

It also recommended that players' contracts be extended until the end of the interrupted football seasons and that the transfer window should not open until that time.

The call from FIFA comes as Premier League clubs are locked in talks with players and their representatives about taking pay cuts. The English top flight is lagging behind other European leagues.

In Spain, Barcelona and Atletico Madrid players have agreed to pay cuts of 70 percent. Many politicians have urged action from the Premier League and in a poll conducted by British polling company YouGov last week, 92 percent of respondents said they backed a pay cut.

But some leading players resent the political pressure.

until such time that the season does actually end." "A similar principle applies for contracts scheduled to begin when the new season starts," it said. "Meaning the entry into force of such contracts is delayed until the season actually does start."

In Italy, where all football has been suspended since March 9, clubs in Serie A agreed on Monday that player salaries will be reduced by a third of their gross annual earnings if the season should be cancelled, and a sixth if it resumes.

Individual agreements must still be signed between the clubs and players, who will waive between two and four months' salary. The decision was reached unanimously by Serie A clubs, with the exception of Juventus, which had already reached an agreement with its own players, said Lega Serie A.

Juventus said the salary cuts accepted by its players and coach Maurizio Sarri over the period from March to June would have "a positive impact of 90 million euros on the 2019/2020 financial year".

In Spain, where Barcelona players, like their English counterparts, had been criticised for not agreeing a pay cut, six-time Ballon d'Or winner Lionel Messi announced

Former England captain Wayne Rooney has criticised the government and the Premier League for placing footballers in a "no-win" situation. "In my opinion it is now a no-win situation," Rooney said in a newspaper column. "Whatever way you look at it, we're easy targets." Meanwhile, the chief executive of England's Professional Footballers' Association, the players' union, said he would not take a cut to his £2 million salary.

"The PFA will make donations and the PFA is involved in the players' charity," Gordon Taylor told The Guardian when asked directly if he would accept a reduction in salary.

Taylor added his members believed the Premier League's suggestion of a proposed 30 percent wage reduction across all top-flight clubs was impractical given the teams' differing financial positions.

UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin said on Monday that there is "no way" Liverpool should finish the season without the Premier League title, even if the campaign is cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Jürgen Klopp's Liverpool appeared set to secure a first English top-flight title in 30 years when the season was suspended, sitting 25 points clear of second-placed Manchester City.—AFP

FIFA urges clubs, players to reach deal over wages

LAUSANNE: FIFA on Monday urged clubs and players to reach agreement on wage reductions to protect clubs suffering financial damage due to the coronavirus crisis, sources said.

The call from world football's governing body comes as Premier League clubs are locked in talks with players and their representatives about taking pay cuts after government ministers called on players to "play their part". Italian top-flight football clubs on Monday agreed to cut the salaries of players, coaches and staff. Clubs in other countries, including Barcelona, have also cut player wages.

FIFA is also recommending that players' contracts be extended until the end of the interrupted football sea-



FIFA President Gianni Infantino

last week that the squad had agreed to a 70 percent pay reduction as the club faces a loss of revenue.

"We clearly won't manage to earn what we had been expecting to," Barcelona president Josep Maria Bartomeu said. Atletico Madrid's players quickly followed in agreeing a similar pay cut.—AFP