



8 Custody and the coronavirus:
Parents denying visitation rights



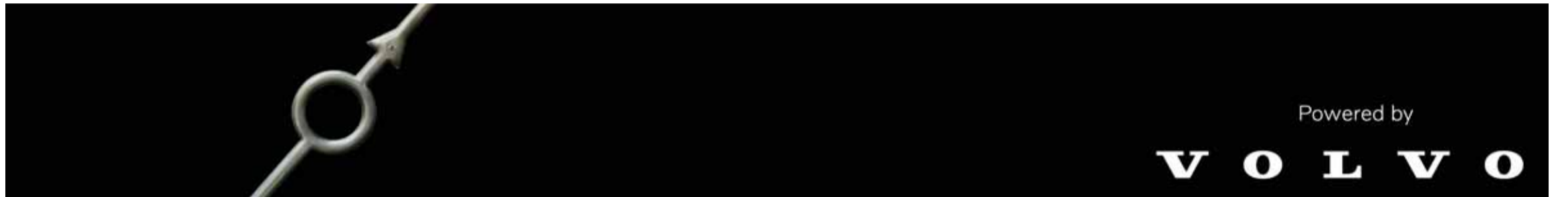
15 Virtual concert featuring Stones,
Swift celebrates health workers



16 Tehran reopens as economic
hardship trumps virus risks



20 Tennis 'big three' to help
lowest-ranked players



Amir urges Kuwaiti returnees to abide by health measures

1 death, 164 new infections in Kuwait • MP calls for reducing rent to help tenants



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah addresses the nation yesterday. — KUNA

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday urged thousands of Kuwaiti citizens repatriated from abroad to strictly comply with health instructions, especially home quarantine, in order to curb the spread of the coronavirus in the country. Addressing the nation to welcome the return of Kuwaitis from abroad, HH the Amir said that the government has exerted all efforts and taken all necessary measures to ward off the dangers of the coronavirus and safeguard the health of people in Kuwait.

HH the Amir said that failing to abide by health instructions could cause a high loss of life. He added that Kuwait, like the rest of the world, is still passing through a very dangerous crisis while confronting the spread of the coronavirus. In the televised speech, HH the Amir said he and the government took every care to ensure the return of thousands of Kuwaitis to their homes before the holy fasting month of Ramadan, and congratulated the repatriated citizens and their relatives on their safe return.

Cooperation, solidarity, and commitment to all

guidelines will help us defeat the pandemic and record as minimal damage as possible, affirmed HH Sheikh Sabah. He reiterated his appreciation to the Cabinet, the people of Kuwait, as well as the public and private sectors for their efforts to counter the spread of the coronavirus to protect all citizens and expatriates alike.

The health ministry said yesterday that the number of COVID-19 infections in Kuwait reached 164 in the last 24 hours, in addition to a single death case of an Indian resident. Official spokesperson of the ministry of health Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said in his daily briefing that the number of infections in Kuwait rose to 1,915. Contact cases reached 158, including six Kuwaitis, 97 Indian residents, 13 Bangladeshis, 26 Egyptians, eight Pakistanis, an American, a Saudi, a Sudanese, a Palestinian, a Lebanese and an Iranian.

An air bridge was launched yesterday to repatriate thousands of Kuwaitis who have been stranded abroad by the coronavirus shutdowns. The three-phase program is expected to repatriate up to 50,000 Kuwaitis from several countries.

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MoH taps tech to monitor returnees isolated at home



KUWAIT: The ministry of health has launched a mobile application to monitor home-quarantined people as the country starts a massive operation to repatriate citizens stranded abroad due to the novel coronavirus outbreak. The app called Shlonik (colloquial Kuwaiti for 'how are you?') will help the health ministry gauge quarantined people's abidance of relevant rules, Dr Mona Al-Khabaz, head of the ministry's team in charge of digital monitoring of home-quarantined people, told KUNA.

She clarified that all returnees had to install the app on their mobile phones and turn Bluetooth on. Shlonik will track their movements and notify the ministry if they break quarantine rules and leave home, Khabaz said. In this case, the ministry will immediately contact the concerned person and ask them to send a live photo to check their location, she said. She revealed that the ministry teams will also send messages daily at random times to the quarantined people, asking them to send live selfies, which will be examined and matched with their previously sent photos.

The interactive app will also help doctors communicate with the quarantined people and follow up their health conditions and detect coronavirus symptoms, such as sneezing, coughing, fever and breathing difficulties, Khabaz indicated. She noted that if a person has any of these symptoms, the ministry will swiftly send preventive health teams to make all medical checkups and transfer the person to a hospital if the necessity arises. She added the Shlonik app has other features, mainly the latest health updates, a health bot, a check-in for quarantined patients, vitals check and a communication link to MoH medical teams.

Continued on Page 16

Rules should be same for Ramadan as Easter: Trump

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump said Saturday he hopes US Muslims will be held to the same social distancing standards during Ramadan as Christians at Easter, when a number of faithful chafed against coronavirus-related restrictions on large gatherings. The US president made the comments after being asked to defend a retweet of a conservative commentator who seemed to question whether Muslims would be treated with the same severity as Christians who broke social distancing rules.

"I would say that there could be a difference," Trump said during his daily coronavirus press conference. "And we'll have to see what will happen. Because I've seen a great disparity in this country. They go after Christian churches but they don't tend to go after mosques," he said. Ramadan, which begins at sunset on Thursday, falls a week and a half after Easter, when some Christians bucked public health regulations to attend illicit services.

Masks help Syrian family integrate in French village

LAVARDAC, France: The lanes of Lavardac, a tiny village in the southwest of France, are largely silent during the nationwide lockdown, but a rhythmic whir can be heard from the upstairs window of one unassuming house. It is the sound of sewing machines being used to make fabric coronavirus masks for the local population by five Syrian Kurdish refugees.

The Shikho family - brothers Mustapha, Mohamad, Fawzi, Hekmat and their brother-in-law Riad - decided to produce the masks as a show of "solidarity" with their fellow townsfolk and as a gesture of gratitude for allowing them to settle in Lavardac in 2016. In a narrow room with white walls that serves as a workshop, the family cuts out, sews and folds the colored fabrics.

And dozens of finished handmade masks stand ready on an ironing board to be delivered to the nearby pharmacy. "We wanted to be of service to the locals who cannot go out. We know what it's like to stay locked up," says Mustapha, the oldest. "In our case, it was the war." The 31-year-old, who like his

Asked whether he thought imams would refuse to follow social distancing orders, Trump responded: "No, I don't think that at all. I am somebody that believes in faith. And it matters not what your faith is. But our politicians seem to treat different faiths very differently." Trump has been accused of anti-Muslim rhetoric in the past and one of his first acts upon entering office was to ban travelers from several Muslim-majority countries.

More than 700,000 cases of coronavirus have been reported in the United States, forcing religious communities across the country to shutter their doors. The Islamic Society of North America, alongside Muslim medical experts, has urged the suspension of group prayers, among other gatherings. Jewish Americans were likewise forced to turn traditional Passover seders into virtual affairs when the eight-day holiday began at sundown on April 8.

Despite similar measures taken across much of the Christian community, a Virginia pastor who continued to preach in defiance of stay-at-home rules died a week ago of coronavirus. And pastors at two megachurches in Florida and Louisiana have been arrested on misdemeanor charges for flouting stay-at-home orders. "The Christian faith is treated much differently than it was," Trump added on Saturday, "and I think it's treated very unfairly." — AFP

Border forces foil attempt to smuggle drugs



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti border personnel detained six Iraqis who attempted to smuggle a large amount of narcotics into the country, the interior ministry said on Saturday. The ministry said in a statement the border forces, who monitored the smugglers via thermal cameras, found in their possession 105 kilograms of hashish, amphetamine pills, a Kalashnikov assault rifle and a 9 mm pistol. The detainees and the confiscated contraband were referred to relevant authorities pending legal action. — KUNA



LAVARDAC, France: Syrian refugee Hekmat Shikho prepares to distribute protective masks on April 16, 2020 in southwestern France, where he and his family found asylum after fleeing the war in Syria. — AFP

brother Mohamad is a tailor by training, had initially planned to open a workshop in Lavardac, a leafy community of just 2,300 souls. But the nationwide lockdown in France, in force since March 17, changed all that and they decided to work from home.

"We had a pile of fabric. We began by making masks for the family," says 24-year-old Mohamad. "We said to ourselves: 'Why not make it for our friends, the inhabitants?'"

Continued on Page 16

Amir hosts senior Kuwait officials at Seif Palace

Pandemic Diaries

Missing the great outdoors



By Jamie Etheridge

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The Spanish government has announced that it will allow children to leave their homes from April 27, five weeks after the country was placed on lockdown as part of the government's efforts to limit the spread of the coronavirus there.

In Kuwait, most of our kids have been kept at home since the National Day holiday week, when the first coronavirus cases were confirmed. My children have been in the house almost continuously (with a few walks around the block or the park before the closure of all public spaces). This week starts their eighth week of staying at home. It has become a routine, the new normal, and they have pretty much stopped asking to go outside. I'm lucky to have a small balcony where they can get some sun and fresh air, though this is hardly satisfying.

When you live in an urban environment and especially in a desert urban environment like Kuwait where summer temperatures reach 55C, spending time outdoors can be a challenge under normal circumstances. In the midst of a pandemic, when the government has called upon us all to stay at home and help flatten the curve, spending time outdoors becomes a near impossibility.

It may seem insignificant - the need to go for a walk around the park or stroll along the beach - but outdoor time is as crucial as a healthy diet or regular exercise. All of us need outdoor time. Spending time in nature and the outdoors is known to improve one's mood. It can also lower blood pressure, improve heart health, reduce the risk of premature death, lower stress and improve the overall quality of life.

Now with Ramadan and summer fast approaching, our opportunities for enjoying the beautiful outdoor spaces of Kuwait are fast diminishing. In four days we will start the holy month of Ramadan, and the curfew in place means that nighttime activities will be limited to the home. By the time we are likely released from the curfew, summer will have fully arrived and even late-night strolls around Shaheed Park will mean walking in a minimum sweltering 50C heat.

The pandemic has disrupted so much of normal life. It has caused deaths of 161,000+ people around the globe and many more are expected to die. It has triggered a global economic slump that may take years from which to recover. It has impacted our financial, social and mental health in myriad and uncountable ways. Going for a walk seems such a minor loss, and yet, so much of those simple freedoms define our reality.



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. —Amiri Diwan photos

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received yesterday at Seif Palace His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. His Highness the Amir received National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh, Deputy Director of the Directorate General of Investigations Major General Dr Asaad Abdulrahman Alruwaieh, who took the oath in front of His Highness on assuming his new post. The meeting was attended by Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah.— KUNA



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

Education ministry mulls e-learning preparations

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Ministry of Education (MoE) under-secretaries' council held a meeting Saturday with Education Minister Saud Al-Harbi to discuss a number of major topics, such as recording scientific material for all stages from primary to secondary to be used on the educational platform. The meeting also discussed scheduling the tasks

and accelerating the process to get the task done within time. The council also hailed the role played by the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS), which provided 12 studios and fully equipped them in accordance to the needs of MoE, which is a clear embodiment of partnership in developing the educational process and opting for e-learning as an alternative for students in various stages in view of the current circumstances and the spread of COVID-19. The meeting also discussed the tasks other sectors, namely the financial and administrative affairs sector, should play in terms of contracts and supervision and the need to coordinate with various relevant state bodies. Finally, the meeting discussed handing over some school buildings to various state bodies to be used as temporary quarters during the current crisis.

News in brief

Flour factory closed

KUWAIT: Kuwait Flour Mills and Bakeries Company announced the suspension of flour production in one of its factories because some workers were suspected to be infected with coronavirus, affirming that the rest of factories will still producing flour automatically fills flour bags through machines.

Volunteers test positive

KUWAIT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) announced that two volunteers tested positive for coronavirus. KRCS volunteers have been assisting state authorities in providing care for people under treatment or in quarantine, as well as aiding state efforts in curbing the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

Curfew breakers arrested

KUWAIT: Twelve people were arrested on Saturday for breaking the curfew, including five Kuwaitis and seven expats, the Interior Ministry announced. Six were arrested in Ahmedi, three in Hawally, one in Capital, one in Jahra and one in Mubarak Al-Kabeer. They were taken to the proper authorities to face legal action, it said.

Coronavirus in Kuwait: What we know so far

KUWAIT: Kuwait has so far recorded 1,915 cases infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), in addition to seven deaths. With the exception of 38 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 hundreds have been discharged from quarantine after exhibiting no symptoms during their 14-day quarantine period, the Ministry of Health confirmed. Meanwhile, 305 people have recovered completely after previously being infected with the virus, the ministry said. There are 1,603 people receiving treatment and 1,367 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 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 supermarkets, restaurants and shops 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. The Ministry of Commerce launched a website (www.moci.shop) to enable people to book appointments to shop at co-operative societies in their areas. The Public Authority for Industry also announced that companies can apply to evacuate their workers from Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and Mahboula. To do so, they must fill a 'workers evacuation form' available on www.pai.gov.kw, and send the form via email to: Jasiri@moh.gov.kw.

Precautions

Kuwait halted all commercial flights until further notice, and has sent special flights to repatriate Kuwaitis back home from countries affected with the virus' spread. 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. Meanwhile, the Cabinet announced on April 9 the operation of all airline flights for expats who are wishing to return back to their countries. 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), Bangladesh (April 11-15), India (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 Naeem 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 (Ahmedi 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
- Meanwhile, all licensed pharmacies in Kuwait delivering medicine are allowed to continue their services 24 hours a day.

The Ministry of Health is also asking doctors and nurses affiliated with the private medical sector to volunteer in order to contribute to the fight against the virus. Volunteering is available through the link: <http://volunteering.q8-ehelth.com>. The ministry had closed all private clinics and medical centers effective March 22, 2020 until further notice.

Mental health assistance

The Kuwait Psychological Association (KPA) is providing consultation through the phone for people suffering from the psychological impacts of coronavirus. Different doctors are working on the hotline in different timings as follows:

- Dr Rashed Al-Sah: on Monday and Wednesday 10:00 am - 1:00 pm. Call 9797-6168.
- Dr Fahad Al-Tasha: daily from 8:00 pm - 12:00 am. Call 9904-8258.
- Dr Othman Al-Asfour: daily 5:00 pm - 8:00 pm. Call 9938-5350.
- Dr Mohammed Al-Khaldi (head of this team): daily 9:00 am - 12:00 pm. Call 9903-6470.
- Dr Ahmad Al-Khaldi: daily 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm. Call 9910-7965.
- Dr Muneera Al-Qattan: Monday and Wednesday 9:00 am - 1:00 pm. Call 9953-3108.
- Dr Zainab Al-Saffar: Sunday and Thursday 7:00 pm - 9:00 pm. Call 9954-9908.
- Dr Sameera Al-Kandari: Tuesday 9:00 pm - 12:00 am. Call 6770-9434.
- Dr Kawthar Al-Yaqout: Monday and Wednesday 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm. Call 5521-0088.
- For information and other concerns, call 9401-4283.

Local

Second phase of Kuwaitis' repatriation operation underway

Prime Minister inspects preparations to receive repatriated citizens



KUWAIT: A Kuwait Airways plane carrying Kuwaiti citizens repatriated back home touches down at Kuwait International Airport yesterday. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat and KUNA



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah inspects preparations at the airport on Saturday.

KUWAIT: The second phase of Kuwait's operation to bring back citizens who remained abroad amid the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis kicked off yesterday. Kuwait Airways and Jazeera Airways aircrafts arrived from Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Riyadh yesterday, carrying citizens stranded in different countries around the world.

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, on Saturday, visited Kuwait International Airport to inspect preparation for repatriation of Kuwaiti nationals. His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled's inspection of the airport came in line with guidelines and directives set by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled was accompanied by Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior, and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh, Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah, Minister of State for Services Affairs and Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs Mubarak Al-Harees.

Also present were Chairman of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) Sheikh Salman Al-Humoud Al-Sabah, top officials from the Interior, Foreign, and Health ministries, in addition to representatives and executive of other entities. During his inspection, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled was briefed about the upcoming operations to receive the repatriates and conduct medical tests upon their arrival. Officials reporting to His Highness the Prime Minister affirmed readiness to receive repatriated nationals as part of Kuwait's plan to curb the spread of the coronavirus. Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled expressed his satisfaction over the preparations to receive Kuwaitis from abroad and reflected his trust and support to all those involved in the safe repatriation of Kuwaiti citizens.

Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah affirmed meanwhile that personnel were prepared to receive Kuwaiti citizens repatriating from abroad. Furthermore, he affirmed necessity of adherence to health conditions and procedures to ensure safe return of the citizens from

All resources at returnees' disposal



Kuwaiti citizens leave a Jazeera Airways plane after its arrival at Kuwait International Airport yesterday.

abroad. All available resources have been placed at disposal of the returning citizens, he said, affirming that top health care would be given to those who would be quarantined, warning authorities would not be lenient with anyone who may breach the health precautions during the operation. — KUNA



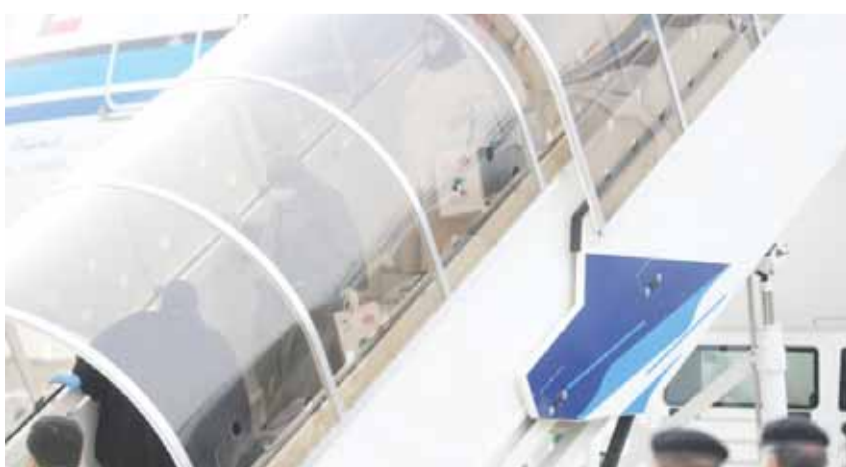
Returnees fill in forms upon their arrival.



Kuwaiti citizens leave a Kuwait Airways plane after its arrival from Abu Dhabi yesterday.



Returnees lined up for a medical examination upon arrival.



Repatriated Kuwaitis leave a plane after its arrival at Kuwait International Airport yesterday.

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed



Indian nationals brave rain to avail amnesty



KUWAIT: Indian nationals queue up outside a school in Farwaniya which was turned into a center to receive applications of violators wishing to avail the amnesty. —Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh



KUWAIT: Despite heavy rain and bad weather conditions, Indian nationals headed for the third day on Saturday to centers set up by the Ministry of Interior to receive expatriates without valid residencies who are wishing to avail 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. Indian nationals are allowed to apply on April 16 - 20, followed by Sri Lankans on April 21 - 25 and other nationalities on April 26 - 30. Bangladeshi nationals were received on April 11 - 15, while Egyptian nationals were received on April 6 - 10, following a five-day period to receive applicants from the Philippines. The Interior

Ministry announced that 5,241 Egyptians applied to avail the amnesty, while over 2,000 Filipinos applied on April 1 - 5.

Violators are received from 8:00 am to 2:00 pm at the following locations: 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. Residency violators from all nationalities are also received in two different locations in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh as follows: Female violators are received at Roufayda Al-Aslamya School - Block 4 - Street 200, while male violators are received at Naem bin Masod School - Block 4 - Street 250.



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Companies pay for workers' sheltering, deportation

KUWAIT: Companies, linked with individuals or groups abusing expatriate workers' residencies by trading in them, will pay full expenses for sheltering and deportation of said labor, said Minister of Social Affairs Mariam Al-Aqeel Saturday. In a press statement, Aqeel — also Minister of State for Economic affairs — indicated that companies abusing the rights of workers would have their cases directly handled by the public prosecution for criminal acts. If found guilty, the accused parties should expect the full force of the law, she affirmed. Aqeel said that citizens and residents alike should band together to fight crime and fend off injustice, especially during these trying times. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Volunteers distributed food to families in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh, which has been put under total lockdown along with Mahboula as part of state efforts to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). —Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh



In my view

Do as you say

By Abdellatif Sharaa

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I was going through some verses of the Holy Quran and came across the verse "And that they say what they do not do"? (26:226).

This brought to my attention that there are many such non-doers around the world, and they just sit behind tables and say this and promise that but at the end of the day, we find that no contribution of any significance was made by them. Such people are very dangerous as they can kill any promising project in its place and can distort anything that may have any benefit to the society, and this can frustrate people and make them doubtful about certain values, and this may lead them to turn their backs to bigger matters.

Such people who only sell words are the worst, and may negatively affect anything they may be responsible for. Another thing is keeping promises and respecting dates, as it has become something normal in our societies to have little respect for time and not commit to appointments. There are many examples, and all lead to one thing - which is that we are plagued by people who say what they do not do, like those who claim to fight corruption all over the media. Many speak about administrative fairness and professionalism in managing people, but in practice, it is really administrative corruption and serving people injustice.

People in any society that is infested with those who say what they do not do, lose faith in development, because those who advocate development and moving forward are the same who put the brakes to stop the wheels from moving. Development and advancement need people who operate according to principles and have ethics that make them keen and devoted in their jobs for the sake of general interest. It is ok to dream that one day the talkers and non-doers disappear and replace their bad habits with good ones, and one must take heart and be optimistic that tomorrow will be better.

Meanwhile, I was at a cooperative store trying to buy tomatoes, and was attempting to keep a safe distance with another man, when a woman barged between us in a really frustrating manner and got on our nerves. I told her very politely that what she did was wrong, if only because we are in the coronavirus era. The woman started screaming at me and the other man, accusing us of being wrong and ill-mannered. The co-op officials thankfully took care of the situation and we were relieved from any further consequences. I mention this incident because the so called lady is a DOCTOR...I leave it to your judgment.

Final word: "There are some people who put you down in life, mock your dreams, and challenge your personality; they look like winners. But in actual fact, they are only voicing out their insecurities and jealousy. Do not let them pull you down. Believe and accept yourself and hold onto what you believe in". —Anon

Local



KUWAIT: Workers from the Ministry of Public Works pave a road near the capital Kuwait City on Saturday, as the Ministry takes the opportunity to repair and repave roads during the curfew hours imposed by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

WHO praises Kuwait's response to pandemic

DOHA: The Regional Director of the World Health Organization (WHO) Dr Ahmad Al-Manzari praised the measures taken by Kuwait in response to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, describing it as swift, decisive, and inclusiveness. The remarks came in an interview Saturday on the sidelines of an online discussion session held by Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development under the title 'Towards a Flat Curve: The Global Response to Coronavirus'. Manzari stressed that Kuwait has strong and well-established health systems and has qualified medical personnel in addition to highly equipped health facilities. He said that WHO is in regular contact with the health leaders in Kuwait, led by the Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah, adding that there are high-level coordination and constant consultation on the procedures recommended by the organization in accordance with the development of the pandemic. The Regional Director also praised the generous support recently provided by Kuwait to the organization to combat the pandemic, while expressing the organization's thanks and appreciation to Kuwait for its continuous support that enables the organization to reach



Dr Ahmad Al-Manzari

health care services to the neediest groups, especially in the areas that suffers from health emergencies. On his evaluation of the process of using blood plasma from those recovering from the virus to treat patients, Manzari affirmed that this process was tried and showed initial success. He stated that the organization does not recommend self-medication, either as a means of preventing or treating the disease, adding that there are several clinical trials underway. International speakers and audience from all over the globe participated in the session, discussing the challenges and hopes related to fighting the coronavirus. —KUNA

Food distributed to returnees

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: In an initiative to support the state's efforts to fight COVID-19 and in collaboration with the Awqaf Secretariat General, Interior Ministry, Ministry of Social Affairs and Civil Aviation, Kuwait Food Bank announced distributing free meals to citizens returning to Kuwait as part of the largest evacuation process in Kuwait's history.



Salem Al-Hamar

Kuwait Food Bank General Manager Salem Al-Hamar said: "The food bank has allocated around 50,000 meals to be distributed to returnees at various arrival lounges, starting from disembarking, entering the waiting and medical test lounges, then leaving the airport either to their homes or quarantines". He added that the bank had earned the state's trust by obtaining the ministry of social affairs' permission to provide citizens returning home with meals, beverages and other services.

Hamar explained that the bank has hundreds of well-experienced volunteers fully trained to work in such circumstances, mostly Kuwaitis, who will be deployed at three airport terminals

following all the measures taken to prevent the spread of the virus. "Volunteers will work according to daily schedules of the returning flights," he underlined.

Hamar stressed that Kuwait Food Bank will continue to exert utmost efforts to help limit the spread of COVID-19 and ensure the safety of both citizens and residents. He also called for ignoring rumors and urged everyone to stay at home, avoid crowds, follow state bodies' guidelines, not take the matter lightly and avoid unjustified panic by rushing to stock huge amounts of food.



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Trump warns China could face virus 'consequences'

Searching for the dead brings extra agony in Ecuador city

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VIGO: A combination of photos shows healthcare workers attending COVID-19 coronavirus patients at the Intensive Unit Care of the Povisa Hospital in Vigo, northwestern Spain. — AFP

Europe virus toll tops 100,000

Online mega-concert raises spirits

WASHINGTON: Coronavirus deaths surged past 100,000 in Europe as the world's top musicians joined forces for a virtual concert, hoping to spread cheer to billions stuck at home under lockdown. A-listers including the Rolling Stones, Taylor Swift, Stevie Wonder and teen superstar Billie Eilish entertained fans with a six-hour online extravaganza celebrating healthcare workers. The event, set up by advocacy group Global Citizen with the World Health Organization, aimed to cultivate a sense of community during the pandemic, which has ravaged the global economy with nearly 2.3 million confirmed infections in total.

At least 157,000 people have been killed by COVID-19 with two-thirds of the deaths in Europe, according to an AFP tally, and nearly a quarter of fatalities in the United States, the worst-hit country. The highly contagious disease first emerged late last year in the city of Wuhan in central China. It was likely transmitted to humans at a market where exotic animals were slaughtered, Chinese scientists have said.

Conspiracy theories that the virus came from a maximum-security laboratory have been brought into the mainstream in recent days by US government officials. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said an investigation was underway into how the virus

"got out into the world". But the director of the virology institute in Wuhan rejected the claims on Saturday, saying it was "impossible" that the disease could have come from his lab.

Lockdown protests

The US has the highest caseload of any country.



At least 157,000 have been killed by COVID-19

with more than 735,000 confirmed infections, and by yesterday had lost 38,910 people to the virus, according to a tally from Johns Hopkins University. Progress was marked in some places, with New York state reporting the lowest number of deaths in weeks, which

Governor Andrew Cuomo attributed largely to social distancing. But as Americans and others around the world chafe after weeks under stay-at-home orders, resentment is rising. Anti-lockdown protests on Saturday drew hundreds of people at the capitols of states including Texas, Maryland, New Hampshire and Ohio. Many demonstrators waved American flags and some carried arms. The small but spreading movement demanding a quick end to state-ordered confinement drew encouragement from Trump, who tweeted that three states should be "liberated" from the stay-home orders.

The president has called for a rapid return to normality to limit damage to the US economy while largely leaving the final decision on easing lockdowns to state officials. At a White House briefing, Trump also warned that China could face consequences if it was "knowingly responsible" for the coronavirus outbreak. "It could have been stopped in China before it started and it wasn't," Trump said. "And now the whole world is suffering." "If it was a mistake, a mistake is a mistake," he said. "But if they were knowingly responsible, yeah, then there should be consequences."

'My family is hungry'

Mounting evidence suggests that social distancing

slowed the pandemic after more than half of humanity - 4.5 billion people - were confined to their homes. Stay-at-home orders have been enforced in Italy and Spain, both still the hardest-hit countries in Europe, with death tolls over 20,000, followed by France, which has recorded more than 19,000 fatalities.

As governments around the world grapple with when and how to ease lockdowns, Spain on Saturday extended its nationwide shutdown to May 9. Japan, Britain and Mexico have all expanded their movement restrictions. Yet elsewhere, signs that the outbreak could be easing prompted Switzerland, Denmark and Finland to begin reopening shops and schools this week.

Germany has declared the virus "under control" after 3,400 deaths, and is beginning the delicate task of lifting some restrictions without triggering a secondary outbreak - with some shops allowed to reopen Monday, and some children returning to school within weeks. Iran also allowed some Tehran businesses to reopen Saturday despite the Middle East's deadliest outbreak. "How can I keep staying home? My family is hungry," said Hamdollah Mahmoudi, 45, a shopworker in Tehran's Grand Bazaar. — AFP

'Church turned morgue' finally empty of coffins

ROME: A church in Bergamo that served as an overspill morgue at the height of Italy's coronavirus epidemic "is finally empty", the mayor said Saturday. Where dozens of coffins once stood, nothing but flowers are left to be seen in a photograph tweeted by mayor Giorgio Gori that symbolizes the easing of a crisis that has killed over 23,000 people in Italy. Bergamo is in the wealthy northern region of Lombardy, which accounts for over half Italy's virus victims.

Italy's coronavirus emergency czar Domenico Arcuri said Saturday that five times as many people had died in the region during the epidemic than had been killed in Milan during World War II bombings. "We are living through a great tragedy, which we have not yet overcome," he said, describing the nearly 12,000 Lombardy dead as an "astounding" figure. Over 90 percent of Saturday's new coronavirus cases in Italy were in Lombardy, the civil protection agency said.

As local morgues failed to cope with the number of deaths in Bergamo, the country's worst-hit city, the Italian army was brought in last month to take dozens of coffins to churches and then to crematoriums in neighboring cities. Harrowing pictures emerged of officers in protective hazmat suits stacking coffins in churches.



ROME: A homeless wearing a protective mask lies asleep on the pavement in Rome's central Piazza Venezia during a lockdown aimed at curbing the spread of the COVID-19 infection. — AFP

'Blink of an eye'

Gori said the death toll in Bergamo was much worse than officially recorded. Some 795 Bergamo residents died in the six weeks since the start of March, 626 more than the average toll in the same period over the past ten years, he said last week. Only 272 people were officially recorded to have died of the virus in Bergamo, as Italy logs deaths in hospitals but not in homes or assisted living facilities.

The epidemic has been slowly on the decline, with the number of intensive care patients in Lombardy falling below the 1,000 mark for the first time in a month Friday. Many are urging the government to lift strict restrictions imposed for the country's two-month lockdown, which is due to expire on May 4 and has been crippling the economy.

But Arcuri said it was "blatantly wrong to talk about a conflict between health and economic recovery". "Without health and safety, economic recovery would last like the blink of an eye," he said. And the WHO's Italian government adviser Walter Ricciardi insisted a second wave of the virus was "not a hypothesis, it is a certainty."

"That's why it is very important not to speed up the reopening," he said. Despite the warnings, some flouted the lockdown. The interior minister said it had caught 8,200 people breaking rules, including social distancing, aimed at preventing the spread of the virus Friday. And in Saviano, a town near Naples, hundreds of people - including local law enforcement officers - thronged the streets Saturday to pay their respects to their mayor, a doctor killed by the coronavirus, Italian media reported. — AFP

44 jihadists found dead in Chad's jail

N'DJAMENA: A group of 44 suspected members of Boko Haram, arrested during a recent operation against the jihadist group, have been found dead in their prison cell, apparently poisoned, Chad's chief prosecutor announced Saturday. Speaking on national television, Youssouf Tom said the 44 prisoners had been found dead in their cell on Thursday. An autopsy carried out on four of the dead prisoners revealed traces of a lethal substance that had caused heart attacks in some of the victims and severe asphyxiation in the others, he said. The dead men were among a group of 58 suspects captured during a major army operation around Lake Chad launched by President Idriss Deby Itno at the end of March.

"Following the fighting around Lake Chad, 58 members of Boko Haram had been taken prisoner and sent to Ndjamen for the purposes of the investigation," said Tom. "On Thursday morning, their jailers told us that 44 prisoners had been found dead in their cell," Tom said, adding that he had attended the scene. "We have buried 40 bodies and sent four bodies to the medical examiner for autopsy." An investigation was ongoing to determine exactly how the prisoners had died, he said.

'It's horrible'

A security source, speaking on con-

dition of anonymity told AFP that "the 58 prisoners were placed in a single cell and were given nothing to eat or drink for two days". Mahamat Nour Ahmed Ibedou, secretary general of the Chadian Convention for the Protection of Human Rights (CTDDH), made similar accusations. Prison officials had "locked the prisoners in a small cell and refusing them food and water for three days because they were accused of belonging to Boko Haram", Ibedou told AFP. "It's horrible what has happened."

The government denied the allegations. "There was no ill-treatment," Chad Justice Minister, Djimet Arabi, told AFP by telephone. "Toxic substances were found in their stomachs. Was it collective suicide or something else? We're still looking for answers," he said, adding that the investigation was still ongoing. One of the prisoners was transferred to hospital on Thursday, but he was "faring much better" and had rejoined "the other 13 prisoners still alive and who are doing very well," the minister said.

Earlier this week, the minister told AFP the captured men had been transferred to Ndjamen on Tuesday evening and handed over to the court system for trial. The military operation against Boko Haram killed more than a thousand of the group's militants and cost the lives of 52 soldiers, a Chadian army spokesman said. The operation ran from March 31 to April 8. It was launched in response to a devastating attack on Chadian troops on March 23 on a base at Bohoma, in the Lake Chad marshlands, that killed 98 soldiers. It was the largest one-day loss the army has ever suffered. — AFP

International

Orthodox Christians celebrate Easter as virus spread fears

Church leaders urge worshippers to stay at home

MOSCOW: More than 260 million Orthodox Christians celebrated Easter Sunday, with church leaders asking worshippers to stay at home to avoid spreading the novel coronavirus. Orthodox Christians, the world's third largest group of Christian believers, this year celebrate Easter a week after Catholics and Protestants because they follow a different calendar.

Last week's Easter celebrations took place in empty churches while Pope Francis livestreamed his traditional message from the Vatican as the pandemic that has killed more than 150,000 made massed worship too risky. Most Orthodox Christians will also skip traditional midnight services, even though Eastern Europe and the ex-Soviet Union where most live have relatively low numbers of confirmed cases of the virus so far.



Churches hold services behind closed doors

However churches will remain open in many regions of the country, which has reported around 36,800 cases of coronavirus and more than 300 deaths.

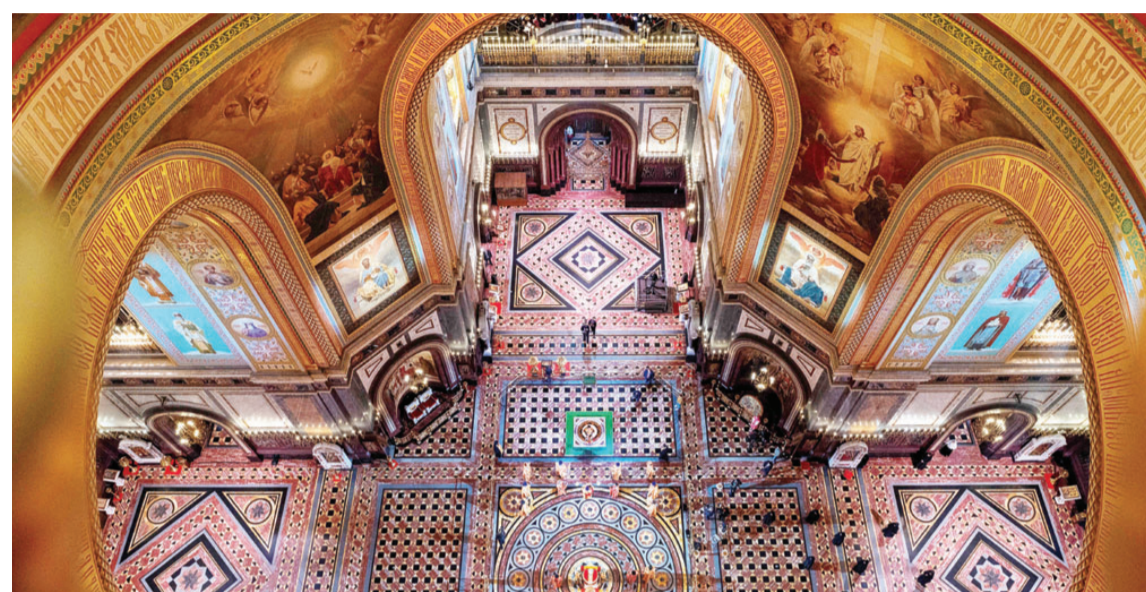
Church officials have asked worshippers who attend to keep their distance, wear masks and not kiss icons. In much of the wider Orthodox region, churches will not be open to the public. The Istanbul-based Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople has announced that services will be closed to the public and broadcast online. The same decision has been taken in Cyprus, Greece, Serbia and North Macedonia as well as in Egypt, where Orthodox Coptic Christians comprise 10-15 percent of the population.

Jerusalem's Old City is normally packed for Orthodox Easter but was almost deserted at the weekend due to Israel's strict lockdown measures. The annual Holy Fire ceremony took place behind closed doors in the city's Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The flame is then taken to Orthodox countries worldwide. According to tradition, the Holy Sepulchre stands on the site of Jesus' crucifixion and burial.

In Romania, while churches have closed their doors, volunteers and priests will go to people's homes handing out loaves of consecrated bread and sharing the holy flame. This compromise has angered some people. "If we can go to a pharmacy to get medicines for our

'Spiritual medicine'

Moscow Patriarch Kirill, who leads 150 million believers, has urged the faithful to pray at home and not go to church until he gives his blessing. Russian President Vladimir Putin dropped his usual attendance at an Easter service and went to a chapel in the grounds of his residence outside Moscow. In Moscow and the surrounding region, where most Russian COVID-19 cases are concentrated, churches held services behind closed doors with broadcasts online or on television.



MOSCOW: Russian Orthodox priests celebrate the Easter service in the Christ the Savior Cathedral in Moscow yesterday, during a strict lockdown in Russia to stop the spread of the novel coronavirus COVID-19. — AFP

body, why can't we go to church for our spiritual medicine?" asked Monica Georgescu, an Orthodox Christian in her 70s who lives in Bucharest and says she has not missed an Easter service since childhood.

Officials versus clerics

A number of Orthodox churches have opposed the imposition of lockdown measures on their most impor-

tant holiday. In Bulgaria the Orthodox Church has insisted services will be open to all, but worshippers will have to wear masks and stand at a minimum distance from each other. In Georgia, which has 385 confirmed cases, the government has bowed to pressure from religious authorities and allowed services in the largest churches despite the public lockdown, while no senior officials will attend. —AFP

Hong Kong activists arrested over rallies

HONG KONG: Police in Hong Kong carried out a sweeping operation against high-profile democracy campaigners on Saturday, arresting 15 activists on charges related to massive protests that rocked the Asian financial hub last year. Among those targeted was 72-year-old media tycoon Jimmy Lai, founder of anti-establishment newspaper Apple Daily, who was arrested at his home. The group also included former lawmakers Martin Lee, Margaret Ng, Albert Ho, Leung Kwok-hung, Au Nok-hin and current lawmaker Leung Yiu-chung.

They are accused of organizing and taking part in unlawful assemblies in August and October, according to the police. Five were arrested on suspicion of publicizing unauthorized public meetings in September and October. "The arrestees were charged or will be charged with related crimes," superintendent Lam Wing-ho said. All 15 are due to appear in court mid-May. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo called the arrests "deeply concerning", saying in a tweet that "politicized law enforcement is inconsistent with universal values of freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly".

'Relieved' to be defendant

"Finally I've become a defendant. How do I feel? I'm very much relieved," Lee, known as the father of democracy in Hong Kong, told media after he was bailed. "For so many years, so many months, so many good youngsters were arrested and charged, while I was not arrested. I feel sorry about it," the 81-year-old barrister and founding chairman of the city's first political party said. He added he does not regret his actions and is proud to walk with Hong Kong's



HONG KONG: Former lawmaker and pro-democracy activist Martin Lee (center) gestures as he leaves the Central District police station in Hong Kong after being arrested and accused of organizing and taking part in an unlawful assembly in August last year. — AFP

youngsters in their fight for democracy - remarks the city's police chief Chris Tang said left him "very worried and surprised".

"As a veteran of the legal profession... he continues to incite youngsters to violate the law. I don't think he should feel proud, he should feel ashamed," Tang said. Media boss Lai was previously detained in February over his participation in another August rally that was banned by police for security reasons. The semi-autonomous city was shaken by widespread and sometimes violent street protests in 2019, sparked by a now-abandoned proposal to allow extraditions to the Chinese mainland and its opaque judicial system.

"Today's arrests of pro-democracy figures in Hong Kong is another nail in the coffin of 'one country, two systems'," said Sophie Richardson, the China director at Human Rights Watch, referring to the principle that guarantees freedoms in the city not seen on the mainland. "It's hard to know Beijing's next precise move, but it seems

Hong Kong officials will further enable abuses rather than defend Hong Kong people's rights."

'This is not the rule of law'

Last year's rallies morphed into a wider movement calling for greater freedoms in the most concerted challenge to Beijing's rule since the former British colony returned to Chinese sovereignty in 1997. The protests and clashes with police have since died down, partly due to exhaustion and arrests but also because of the emergence of the deadly coronavirus.

China's leaders have refused to accede to the protesters' demands, which include fully free elections in the city, an inquiry into alleged police misconduct during the protests and an amnesty for more than 7,000 people arrested during the movement — many of them under the age of 20. Pro-democracy lawmaker Claudia Mo said Saturday the local government "is trying very hard to introduce a reign of terror". — AFP

The dark legacy of internment camps

ORANIENBURG: When Germany's Nazi concentration camps were liberated 75 years ago at the end of World War II, many were immediately put back to use by a new oppressor - the Soviets. A little-known part of German history, the camps continue to haunt the country with victims still seeking justice more than seven decades on.

For years, the sites were "taboo or ignored", said Alexander Latotzky, who was born almost 72 years ago in one such gulag. Officials in the Soviet occupation zone sought to "de-Nazify" junior members of the regime and members of the Hitler youth. In reality, prisoners were left to rot in "Schweigelager", or "silence camps" - isolated from the outside world, abandoned and forced to live in terrible conditions. Disease was rampant and food scarce.

Between 1945 and 1950, more than 43,000 of the roughly 122,000 people held in the camps died from starvation or hypothermia, official figures show. "When I was a young man, I quickly stopped talking," Latotzky said at the Sachsenhausen camp in Oranienburg, north of Berlin, where he spent the first two years

of his life. It is partly because he was tired of being told "your mother must have been a huge Nazi if she was interned there." "It's absolutely untrue," he said. The Soviets also sent political opponents to the camps - including people considered disruptive, like his mother Ursula.

Accused of spying

In spring 1946, Ursula, then 20, returned to her Berlin apartment and found her mother raped and strangled to death by "two men wearing Russian uniforms". She reported the crime to the authorities, and a few weeks later was accused of spying. She was sentenced to 15 years and interned in a camp in Torgau, Saxony. She fell in love with a Ukrainian soldier, but their secret romance ended abruptly when she became pregnant. "My mother was sent to the Bautzen camp to give birth... and my father to Russia, to the gulag, a day before I was born," Latotzky said.

Ursula and her baby were then transferred to Sachsenhausen. In 1950, the camp was dissolved and East Germany took charge of the detainees. Many of them, including Ursula, were sent to prison and separated from their children. And so began a nomadic life for Latotzky, shunted from family to family. He was nine when his mother, who said she would work for the East German secret police to get her son back, managed to get him across the border into West Berlin. — AFP

China revises its death toll

SINGAPORE: Here are the latest developments in Asia related to the novel coronavirus pandemic:

Wuhan deaths rise

The Chinese city where the coronavirus first emerged raised its death toll by 50 percent to a total of 3,869. The revision came as a growing chorus of world leaders suggested China had not been entirely open about the full domestic impact of the virus. The additional deaths in Wuhan were cases that were "mistakenly reported" or missed entirely, according to the official announcement. That also pushed the nationwide death toll up sharply to 4,632, based on official data. Meanwhile, China's economy shrank for the first time in decades during the last quarter. "We are now facing rising pressure in the prevention of imported epidemic infections, as well as new difficulties and challenges for resuming work and production," National Bureau of Statistics spokesman Mao Shengyong told a press conference.

Duterte threatens

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has threatened to order the military and police to take control of the country's capital if people do not start obeying a virus lockdown. "The military and police will enforce social distancing at curfew... It's like martial law. You choose," he said. The Philippines has detected about 5,660 coronavirus cases and recorded 362 deaths, but those figures are expected to climb as the nation ramps up testing. Duterte's remarks came as nine inmates locked up at the Quezon City

Libyan forces loyal to Tripoli advance

TRIPOLI: Forces aligned with Libya's internationally recognized government said they had advanced on Saturday on Tarhouna, a key support base for their eastern-based rival Khalifa Haftar. The advance comes days after forces loyal to the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA) had pushed back Haftar's allies along the coast west of the capital, marking a possible turning point in their attempt to fend off a year-long offensive by Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA).

Tarhouna, about 65 km southeast of the capital, Tripoli, has been a crucial asset for the LNA, providing local manpower for a campaign that has leaned heavily on air support supplied by the United Arab Emirates as well as Russian military contractors. GNA attempts to swing Tarhouna to its side have failed. The GNA has depended on military support including drone strikes provided by Turkey, which has stepped up its involvement in Libya's conflict this year. One witness from Tarhouna said residents had heard loud blasts from Saturday morning, followed by the sound of intensive clashes



TRIPOLI: Libyans check the site of shelling on the residential area of souq Al-Gomaa, north of the Libyan capital Tripoli. — AFP

in an outlying area of the town that continued for up to six hours.

LNA officials told Reuters the GNA forces had failed to enter the town and that the offensive, the first since Haftar launched his military bid for Tripoli in early April 2019, had been repelled. They also said they had shot down a drone. LNA forces control eastern and southern Libya and have been positioned around the outskirts of Tripoli for a year. The capital has seen heavy bombardment in recent days, and shelling continued on Saturday, wounding at least 10 civilians, local medics said.

The GNA has also been trying to capture al-Watiya airbase, about 125 km southwest of Tripoli and the LNA's other strategic foothold in Tripoli. Libya is struggling to prepare for the expected spread of the new coronavirus, and the GNA on Friday imposed a 24-hour curfew in western regions it controls for 10 days. Libya has confirmed 49 cases, including one death. Libya slid into turmoil after the 2011 NATO-backed uprising that toppled former ruler Muammar Gaddafi. Since 2014 rival factions based in Tripoli and the east have vied for power. — Reuters

Jail in Manila - which is so overfull that prisoners have to take turns sleeping in staircases and open-air basketball courts - tested positive for the virus. About 30 other prisoners at the facility were showing virus symptoms, sparking urgent calls from rights groups to avert "catastrophe" by easing congestion.

Hong Kong airline sheds staff

Hong Kong's flagship carrier Cathay Pacific said it was closing its US cabin crew bases in New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles with a loss of 286 jobs. The airline blamed the coronavirus pandemic, saying it had "virtually halted travel". Only three percent of its previous routes are running and in March it had just 311,000 passengers - a 90 percent drop on the same month last year. "As the economic impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic is intensifying, a recovery timeline in our customer demand remains impossible to predict," said Ronald Lam, Cathay's chief customer and commercial officer.

Cruise passengers tracked

Australian police began contacting thousands of Ruby Princess cruise ship passengers from around the world as part of a criminal investigation into the liner, whose arrival in Sydney led to hundreds of coronavirus cases and at least 19 deaths in the country. A questionnaire will be sent to more than 5,000 people. It follows reports a Californian man became the first international death linked to the cruise ship. "The questionnaire will allow us to zero in on elements of the cruise that we are interested in," Assistant Commissioner Stuart Smith told reporters. Police are investigating operator Carnival Australia over the circumstances that led to thousands of passengers disembarking in mid-March despite some exhibiting flu-like symptoms. — AFP

International

Trump warns China could face 'consequences' over pandemic

US stay-at-home frustration spreads; New York battered

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump has warned that China could face consequences if it was "knowingly responsible" for the coronavirus pandemic. "It could have been stopped in China before it started and it wasn't," Trump told reporters at a White House briefing. "And now the whole world is suffering because of it."

Trump was asked whether China should suffer consequences over the pandemic which began in the Chinese city of Wuhan in December and has left more than 157,000 people dead around the world. "If they were knowingly responsible, certainly," he said. "If it was a mistake, a mistake is a mistake. But if they were knowingly responsible, yeah, then there should be consequences," Trump said. "Was it a mistake that got out of control or was it done deliberately?" he asked. "That's a big difference between those two."

"In either event they should have let us go in," he said. "We asked to go in early. And they didn't want us in. I think they knew it was something bad and they were embarrassed." "They said they're doing an investigation," the president continued. "So let's see what happens with their investigation. But we're doing investigations also." The Trump administration has said it doesn't rule out that the novel coronavirus was spread - accidentally - from a laboratory researching bats in Wuhan.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian - who previously alleged that the US military may have brought the virus into China - has rejected US media reports on the subject and said there is "no scientific basis." Trump also cast doubt on official Chinese figures showing the country has suffered just 0.33 deaths per 100,000 people. "The number's impossible," he said. "It's an impossible number to hit." The United States, according to a chart displayed at the briefing, has had 11.24 deaths per 100,000 people while France has had 27.92 and Spain 42.81.

Stay-at-home frustration

Demonstrations to demand an end to stay-at-home measures that have pummeled the US economy have

spread to Texas as the governor at the epicenter of the US coronavirus crisis said his state of New York may finally be past the worst. New York, which has recorded nearly half the country's deaths from COVID-19, the respiratory disease caused by the highly infectious virus, on Saturday reported 540 coronavirus-related deaths for April 17, down from 630 a day earlier and the lowest daily tally since April 1.

The number of patients in the state requiring intensive care and ventilators to help them breathe was also down. "If you look at the past three days, you could argue that we are past the plateau and we're starting to descend, which would be very good news," New York Governor Andrew Cuomo said in his daily briefing. Some 2,000 people were still being hospitalized with COVID-19 every day, Cuomo said, and he noted 36 of the latest New York deaths occurred at nursing homes, which have been ravaged by the pandemic nationwide.

In neighboring New Jersey, both the number of new hospitalizations and new coronavirus cases were also slightly down from the day before, Governor Phil Murphy said. But he added: "We are not out of the woods, we have not yet plateaued." Illinois reported 125 new coronavirus deaths and an additional 1,585 cases

but said the growth rate was slowing. Murphy said he had a "concerning" call with Senate minority leader and fellow Democrat Chuck Schumer, who told him there was no momentum in the US Congress for direct aid to states whose economies were suffering from the stay-at-home orders aimed at curbing the spread of the virus.

Without federal aid, the state will see "historic" layoffs, he said. More than 22 million Americans have filed for unemployment benefits in the past month as closures of businesses and schools and severe travel restrictions have hammered the economy. But an influential research model said late on Friday the strict adherence to the orders imposed in 42 of the 50 US states was a key factor behind an improved outlook for the country's coronavirus death toll.



Chinese FM alleged US may have brought the virus into China

Violence, looting point to food crisis in South Africa

CAPE TOWN: "Mr President we are in the middle of a food crisis. It's war out here," warned Joanie Fredericks, a community leader in Mitchells Plain township in Cape Town. The desperate plea was made in a video posted on social media to South African President Cyril Ramaphosa who imposed a five-week lockdown to try curb the spread of the coronavirus. "People have broken into tuck shops. They have attacked people. The simple reason is because they are hungry," she said from a kitchen dishing cooked meals into packs for distribution to the poor.

Four weeks into a 35-day lockdown poor communities are facing food shortages as incomes for mostly informal workers have dried up. Imposed from March 27, the lockdown has placed already cash-strapped citizens under further strain. The numbers of people lining up for food at the self-funded scheme run by Fredericks and other volunteers are growing by the day. "When we started out feeding people we started out with the very vulnerable, ...the children, the disabled people and the pensioners."

"But we are way past that Mr President, we are past the stage of sending people away," an emotional Fredericks pleaded. Already, several violent protests have broken out across the country over access to food parcels handed out by authorities. Hundreds of angry people fought running battles with the police, hurling rocks and setting up street barricades with burning tyres in Mitchells Plain over undelivered food parcels on Tuesday.

Police fired rubber bullets and teargas to disperse them. Social commentators fear such violent episodes could escalate. "There's a bunch of us at home getting fat and there's a bunch of people who really have nothing," said Julian May, director of the Centre of Excellence in Food Security, at the University of the Western Cape. "And it speaks a lot about the inequalities in South Africa (that) are likely to come out," said May.

"As people are not getting food parcels or hear of other people getting parcels they are starting to react. And I don't think that's going to ease unless there's more rapid delivery of food to people in poor areas." South Africa is ranked one of the most unequal countries in the world. A study by the national statistics agency in 2017 found that 20 percent of households in the country of 57 million, had inadequate access to food. The lockdown and its impact on the poorest is at breaking point. "It's a very, very dangerous situation," said Scott Drimie, of the think-tank Southern Africa Food Lab.

Already South Africa has a history of frequent protests over basics like water and housing crisis. "Now when you add hunger to that, now there's deprivation ...and then you add the enforcement with the army and police that needs to be handled very carefully," warned Drimie. The Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS) warned that if people cannot get food, "there is every likelihood of violent conflict, including widespread looting". —AFP

Searching for the dead brings extra agony in Ecuador

GUAYAQUIL: Darwin Castillo's father died in Guayaquil during the coronavirus pandemic that has caused the Ecuadorian city's health system to collapse. But when Castillo went to the overwhelmed morgue to recover him, he opened a body bag to find the person inside wasn't his father. Two weeks have passed and he still hasn't found the body. Guayaquil, Ecuador's largest city, is the capital of Guayas province has recorded roughly 70 percent of the country's more than 8,200 coronavirus cases.

Castillo, 31, who works in a factory making plastic products, ended up returning the coffin he had purchased to the funeral home. "I don't blame the hospital or the morgue. There were people dying at the entrance," he told AFP. "I would like my dad to appear so I can give him a Christian burial, to give a bouquet of roses to my old man." Castillo's father, Manuel,

was 76 and a dialysis patient, who died on March 31 due to a catheter obstruction.

His son went to the Los Ceibos hospital - the largest in Guayaquil, which has been dedicated to coronavirus cases - two days later to recover the body. When he got to the morgue he found it filled with corpses and paid an employee a \$150 bribe to recover his father's body among some 170 that were piled up. Among the abundance of death, authorities installed a refrigerated truck outside the morgue to hold 46 bodies.

'Incomprehensible'

When Castillo opened the body bag with the wrong person inside, he was surprised to find "a man with a mustache and different clothes." "The gentleman had the wristband they give you when you enter the hospital and it said Rodriguez," Castillo added. So the morgue suggested he search among the bodies, including COVID-19 victims. "If there hadn't been this problem, I would have searched from dead to dead for my dad, but I would have been exposing myself" to the virus, he said. So he refused.

Central Park, the calm amid NY's COVID-19 storm

NEW YORK: Gone are the softball games, horse-drawn carriages and hordes of tourists. In their place are pronounced birdsong, solitary walks and renewed appreciation for Central Park's beauty during New York's coronavirus lockdown. The 843-acre park - arguably the world's most famous urban green space - normally bustles with human activity as winter turns to spring. But this year due to COVID-19, it's the wildlife that is coming out to play. "The energy is quiet, you hear the birds, you hear the wind differently," 66-year-old former ballet dancer Timothy Foster said, while walking his dog Charlie near the park's Belvedere Castle.

'Disturbing'

More than 40 million people visit

Custody and virus: Parents denying visitation rights

CHICAGO: It has been more than a month since Jennifer Leeper's ex-husband has seen their 12-year-old daughter, despite him being granted regular contact after the divorce. Leeper, 48, of Sacramento, California, is defying the custody set-



ANDOVER: Medical workers load a deceased body into an ambulance while wearing masks and personal protective equipment (PPE) at Andover Subacute and Rehabilitation Center in Andover, New Jersey. —AFP

The University of Washington's predictive model, regularly updated and often cited by state public health authorities and White House officials, projected the virus would take 60,308 US lives by Aug 4, down 12% from a forecast earlier in the week. The model predicted some states may be able to begin safely easing restrictions as early as May 4.

Pushback

Many have already started pushing back against the measures. Governor Murphy chastised an official in Atlantic County, home to Atlantic City, for expressing frustration in a Facebook post over the effect of the closures on the casino-dependent local economy. County surrogate Jim Curcio said his comments were his personal opinion.

"I've lived here all my life and when we go into a recession here we seem to be the last to come out of it and people suffer terribly and the most vulnerable suffer the most," Curcio told Reuters on Saturday. "What is happening to the private sector is my breaking my heart."

On Saturday, several dozen protesters gathered in the Texas capital of Austin chanting "USA! USA!" and "Let us work!" In Brookfield, Wisconsin, hundreds of demonstrators cheered as they lined a main road and waved American flags to protest at the extension of that state's "safer at home" order. Earlier in the week, scattered protests erupted in the capitols of Ohio, Minnesota, Michigan and Virginia. The demonstrators mostly flouted the social-distancing rules and did not wear the face masks recommended by public health officials. —Agencies



GUAYAQUIL: Relatives of a person who died from the new coronavirus - some in protective suits - carry the wrapped coffin inside a cemetery in the north of Guayaquil, Ecuador. —AFP

The chaos in hospitals and funeral parlors - in addition to the government lockdown - means many bodies remain in homes for days before being collected. The government, which over the last few days has collected 1,400 bodies from homes and

hospitals in Guayaquil, uses a website to notify individuals of corpses' burial plots. Two cemeteries have been expanded for the COVID-19 dead. Although Castillo entered his father's details, his name didn't appear on the website. —AFP



NEW YORK: A woman wearing a mask walks in the almost deserted Central Park in Manhattan in New York City. —AFP

known infections.

The outbreak has coincided with the blooming of Central Park's cherry blossom and crabapple trees, as well as North America's spring bird migration.

Yellow pine warblers and blue-gray gnatcatchers frolic near pink and white magnolias and red maple trees, free of the typical background hum of traffic and planes overhead. —AFP

tlement out of fear that Chloe risks contracting COVID-19 by being with her father. "My preference is to have Chloe stay here with me until this dies down. We can make up the time after this ends," she said. Leeper's story is becoming increasingly common as divorced parents try to balance divvying up time with their children and keeping them safe in the pandemic.

Across the country, bar associations, states and counties have issued advice for parents, mostly informing them to stick to their visitation agreements. But not every case is the same and blanket pronouncements do not work for some parents. For Leeper, the choice has

been simple. As an elementary school teacher with a school-age daughter, she has not left their home since March 13 and neither has Chloe.

Her ex-husband, a construction contractor who lives two hours' drive away, has continued to work and interact with people. Leeper feels this makes her daughter, herself and her current husband, who is deemed high-risk because of health issues, more vulnerable to infection. "He's currently moving and he's had workers in the house that he is moving into and at the house he's moving from. Plus he's... still working. Those are my concerns more than the travel," Leeper said. —AFP

Business

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DUBAI: Foreign workers wearing scarves to protect their faces stand in line to board a bus transporting them to their workplace during the novel coronavirus pandemic in the Emirati city on April 2, 2020. — AFP

Migrant workers left stranded in Gulf

Virus hits low-income workers living in cramped quarters

DUBAI: Charity workers are scouring the United Arab Emirates for empty buildings and Bahrain is repurposing closed schools to rehouse low income laborers from overcrowded accommodation, a hotspot for the coronavirus outbreak in the Gulf. The challenge is not limited to the region's congested labor camps, where one room with bunk beds can sleep about a dozen workers, the virus has also spread in densely populated commercial districts where many expatriates share housing to save on rent. Many have lost jobs and are struggling.

Indian engineer Mohamed Aslam shares a three-bedroom apartment in the UAE capital Abu Dhabi with 14 other people. Health authorities put the building under quarantine after some residents tested positive for the virus. "The charities are covering the food: dinner, lunch, breakfast," he told Reuters. "Praise be to God, because of charity we are surviving."

Aslam is among millions of foreign workers, many from Asia, who form the backbone of Gulf economies and work in the construction, hospitality, retail, transport and services sectors, many of which have been disrupted by the outbreak. Most of the six Gulf Arab states have taken measures to curb the spread of infection, initially linked to travel, by suspending passenger flights, closing most public venues and

imposing curfews. But the number of cases has steadily risen to surpass 16,500 with 111 deaths.

Containment

Most Gulf states have said they face a challenge with migrant workers. Some, including the UAE's Dubai emirate, Qatar, Oman and Kuwait, have locked down areas with a large population of low wage workers. All have stepped up testing. In Saudi Arabia, a video widely circulated on social media showed at least 15 foreign workers being ushered out of one room with bunk beds to be tested for the virus. A Saudi official confirmed the authenticity of the video.

Gulf governments said they are sterilizing labor camps as part of disinfection drives. Bahrain said it would use schools to separate workers. Two charity groups in the UAE said they were looking for empty buildings where workers could isolate. "Many people are infected and are staying with other people," Krishna Kumar, president of UAE-based Kerala Social

Centre said. "We are trying to isolate them."

Three doctors in the UAE, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said overcrowding is one of the biggest factors for the surge in cases. "We have seen clustered outbreaks in the labor camps," one of them said. Authorities in the UAE, which has the second largest number of coronavirus cases after much larger neighbor Saudi Arabia, did not respond to requests for comment. Several Gulf Arab states have allowed outbound flights for expatriates who have lost jobs or been put on leave, but some countries say they are not prepared to take them back.

Destitute

In the UAE, diplomats and four charities said they were delivering thousands of meals, medicine and other essentials each day to people who had become destitute. Indian national Abdulla, who declined to give his last name, said he had not worked at his Abu Dhabi retail job for two weeks and was relying on charity. An Ugandan office assistant living in a labor

camp in Dubai's Jebel Ali, who declined to be named, said he had not been paid in weeks. The UAE has said it would review labor ties with states refusing to repatriate citizens after the ambassadors of India and Pakistan said their countries were not yet ready to do so.

"We're aware of all of those who have been laid off and their plight," Sayed Zulfikar Bukhari, special assistant to Pakistan's prime minister, told Reuters in Islamabad. "We're just waiting to create the right mechanism so that we don't overburden the system of taking people in here," he said, adding airlines needed to be equipped for safety.

Bangladesh Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment Minister Imran Ahmed said Dhaka was working to alleviate citizens' hardships, including sending money to foreign missions "so that migrants in trouble can be taken care of". A Philippines official said citizens overseas can qualify for a government stipend of \$200. Valerie, a Filipina receptionist in Dubai who shares a one-room studio with five others, had her wages cut and is digging into savings to support her parents and six siblings back home.

"I'm worried about my family if I lose my job," she said, adding that she worries about going out to buy groceries. "It's scary. We don't know if we will bring back the virus with us." — Reuters

Hungry, jobless Americans turning to food banks

NEW YORK: American families slammed by the coronavirus pandemic are turning more and more to food banks to get by, waiting hours for donations in lines of cars stretching as far as the eye can see. And with 22 million people out of work seemingly overnight as business closes under the Great Lockdown, these charities feeding hungry and scared people fear the day will come when they cannot cope with the tsunami of demand.

On Tuesday, for instance, some 1,000 cars lined up at a distribution center set up in Pennsylvania by the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank. Demand for its bags of food soared nearly 40 percent in March. At eight centers like that one, some 227 tonnes of food were placed in the trunks of cars of families suddenly unable to put meals on the table, said the organization's vice president Brian Gulish.

"A lot of people are utilizing our service for the first time. They've never turned to a food bank before," said Gulish. So they do not know there is a network of 350 distribution points in southwest Pennsylvania.

"That's why those lines are so long. Because they don't know that network that we have," Gulish added.

All over America, from New Orleans to Detroit, people abruptly stripped of a paycheck are flocking to food banks—sad scenes of desperation among people waiting for their small share of stimulus money included in the \$2.2 trillion emergency relief package approved by Congress last month. Perhaps the most dramatic picture of some Americans' new food insecurity unfolded April 9 in San Antonio, Texas, where a staggering 10,000 cars showed up at one food bank, with some families arriving the night before to just sit and wait.

"We have gone for months without work," a woman who gave her name only as Alana said at a food distribution center in Chelsea in suburban Boston. "I find a lady yesterday with a 15-day-old baby, a newborn. The husband is not working, she has two more kids. She was having no food in her house," said Alana. Everywhere, food bank officials say their needs in the pandemic era have skyrocketed all of a sudden—by 30 percent, for example, at a network in Akron, Ohio. "We built a supply chain over the years that would serve a certain anticipated need for food. Ramping that up 30 percent overnight is nearly impossible," said Dan Flowers, CEO of the Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank.

In part this is because the food banks are caught up in the maelstrom that has hit the US food industry. With restaurants closed because of the lockdown, Americans are stocking up on everything in grocery stores, which no longer can make as many product donations as they usually do. Ditto for restaurants that often donate surplus food to homeless shelters.

Fortunately, the US food industry is in fact making



Gulf countries step up testing, enforce lockdowns



SAN RAFAEL: Volunteers pack boxes full of food at the San Francisco-Marin Food Bank on Saturday in San Rafael, California. — AFP

donations. Food banks including 200 local branches of an organization called Feeding America are even getting special kinds of loads to hand out. US food giant JM Smucker, maker of many well-known products such as Folgers coffee, is a regular donor and has sent extra pallets of food to banks in Ohio. And a distillery called Ugly Dog in Michigan dispatched a truckload of hand sanitizing gel made from residual alcohol and packed in pint bottles that normally hold booze, said Flowers.

'Worn out'

Cash donations are also coming in, ranging from

anonymous people to the likes of Jeff Bezos, the world's richest person, who donated \$100 million to Feeding America. "If it wasn't for that, these food banks would not be able to meet this demand," said Flowers.

The Food Bank For New York City, a major one in the Big Apple, is ordering higher volume than it normally does, said Zanita Tisdale, its director of member engagement. "We know if we're going to go back in a week the cost may have increased significantly or the turnaround time for getting that product to our warehouse may have extended exponentially," she said. — AFP

Business

Cuba's private sector suffering from a drop in tourist numbers

Restaurants, cafes remain closed; convertibles back in garage

HAVANA: Havana is a ghost town. The American convertibles swooned over by tourists are back in the garage, while most restaurants and cafes are closed. Cuba's private sector has been suffering since the island nation closed its borders over the coronavirus pandemic.

In the charming old building where the 1993 comedy "Strawberry and Chocolate" was filmed, a spiral staircase leads to the deserted La Guarida, the most famous privately-owned restaurant, or "paladar", in Cuba. "We decided to close the restaurant from March 15," nine days before Cuba's authorities imposed their first virus-linked restrictions, said owner Enrique Nunez.

By Saturday, the country of 11.2 million people had close to 1,000 coronavirus cases and 32 deaths. "I have friends with restaurants in Spain, they told me what was happening, about the danger, the difficulty of continuing to serve customers in these conditions," Nunez said.

His restaurant usually serves 200 people for each sitting. Omnipresent in tourist guides, it's a must stop for many visitors, including stars such as Beyonce, Madonna or Pedro Almodovar, whose photos adorn the walls.

"That was the main reason we took this decision. We're a very attractive site, many people arrive in Havana with the desire to experience La Guarida." What

that meant was that "we were on the front line" of potential coronavirus infections.

"Tourism was already struggling"

In this communist country where the state and its businesses dominate economic activity, the private sector has little by little managed to make its mark over recent years: it now employs almost 635,000 people, or 14 percent of Cuba's work force. These Cubans rent out rooms, run small restaurants or hair salons, among other activities.

Sorry, we're closed

"Many private enterprises were built on tourists, because no Cuban is going to go to a restaurant and spend

\$100 on a meal," said economist Omar Everleny Perez. So they quickly sensed the danger: two days after the borders were closed to non-residents—a measure subsequently expanded to all arrivals — 16,000 private workers asked for their licenses to be suspended, according to the Labor Ministry, which temporarily exempted them from taxes.

By Wednesday that figure had risen to 119,000, around 19 percent of the private workforce.

This health crisis could not have come at a worse time, on the back of two bad years when Cuban businesses suffered under the increased sanctions imposed by the administration of US President Donald Trump. "The private sector was already struggling, especially in Havana, after the American cruise ships



stop coming" from June 2019 due to new sanctions, said Perez.

It meant that in 2019, the number of tourists dropped by 9.3 percent to 4.3 million. Over recent years, Americans had become the second largest group of tourists after Canadians, thanks to the thawing of tensions with the United States since 2014, under the Barack Obama administration.

"Sorry, we're closed"

In January and February, tourist numbers were down 16.5 percent on the previous year, with a drop of 65 percent for Americans. The sector, the second largest revenue generator on the island nation, was worth \$3.3 billion in 2018.

Even before the coronavirus outbreak, restaurants and sales weren't posting "the same numbers as two years ago, and now COVID-19 has arrived and finished them off," said Perez.

It's been tough on employees used to much higher salaries than the average \$50 a month in the public sector. "Sorry, we're closed," says the old metal sign attached to El Cafe, a coffee shop in Havana's now deserted old town, popular among tourists. Loliet Gonzalez, a 25-year-old psychology student who's worked there for two years said her earnings "allow me to have the quality of life I want." Her boss gave her two weeks' salary to keep her going through the crisis. "For now I'm fine but there will come a time when I'll have to delve into my savings," said Gonzalez. — AFP

India hardens rules on investments

NEW DELHI: India has stepped up scrutiny of investments from companies based in neighboring countries, in what is widely seen as a move to stave off takeovers by Chinese firms during the coronavirus outbreak. India's trade ministry said in a notification dated April 17 the changes to federal rules on investment were meant to curb "opportunistic takeovers/acquisitions". It did not mention China.

Investments from an entity in a country that shares a land border with India will require government approval, it said, meaning they cannot go through a so-called automatic route. "These times should not be used by other countries to take over our companies," a senior government official told Reuters. Similar restrictions are already in place for Bangladesh and Pakistan. But up to now, they have not applied to China and India's other neighbors including Bhutan, Afghanistan, Myanmar and Nepal.

"This will certainly impact sentiment among Chinese investors. However, green-field investments will not be impacted," said Santosh Pai, a partner at Indian law firm



AMRITSAR: A farmer checks flattened wheat crops due to strong wind and rain in a field during a government-imposed nationwide lockdown as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 coronavirus, on the outskirts of Amritsar yesterday. — AFP

Link Legal that advises several Chinese companies. Australia has also said all foreign investment proposals will be assessed by a review board during the coronavirus crisis to prevent a fire sale of distressed corporate assets. Germany has taken similar measures.

A February report by research group Gateway House said Chinese foreign direct investment into India stood at \$6.2 billion. China's Bytedance has plans to invest \$1 billion in India, while automakers including Great Wall Motor Co Ltd and MG Motor, a

unit of China's SAIC, have said they intend to invest millions.

Delano Furtado, a partner with law firm Trilegal, said the notification may also impact Chinese companies with existing investments in the country. "Any follow-on investments in those entities may now require approvals," he said. India's notification also said government approval would also be needed to change the ownership of an Indian entity that had existing foreign investment. — Reuters

Britain mulling new business support scheme

LONDON: Britain is considering a new bailout mechanism to help firms affected by the coronavirus, Sky News reported on Saturday, saying that individual loans to companies could be bundled together into securities. Finance minister Rishi Sunak has already set out a range of different schemes to help companies through a national lockdown which has effectively shuttered large parts of the world's fifth largest economy.

Sunak was now considering an additional program to help provide loans to companies in sectors seen as making a material contribution to the economy such as aviation, retail and hospitality, Sky News reported citing a document circulated to City of London institutions by the finance ministry.

Asked about the report, the finance ministry said: "We're always open to ways to improve the package but no decisions have been taken." Sky News said the proposal included several variations around the concept of pooling loans into a securitization vehicle, which could then be partially backed by the government or sold to the Bank of England.

The scheme would potentially benefit larger firms who cannot issue debt in their own right which is eligible for an existing support scheme, but who require loans larger than those available through a separate program aimed at small and medium-sized companies. The document seen by Sky pre-dates a Treasury decision announced last week which allowed firms with higher turnover to access government support aimed at mid-sized companies. — Reuters

Bahrain king hails Trump

CAIRO/WASHINGTON: Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa expressed his appreciation for US President Donald Trump's efforts in achieving stability in energy markets to boost global economy growth, state news agency BNA said on Saturday. In a phone call between the two leaders, Bahrain's king also welcomed American efforts in maintaining security and stability in the region, and the active role

of the American military "to protect international shipping in the Arabian Gulf, Arab Sea and Bab Al-Mandab."

Al-Khalifa also stressed the importance of international cooperation to fight the coronavirus pandemic. The White House confirmed the call and said the two countries would work together on the coronavirus. "The president and the king will continue to work together to defeat the virus, minimize its economic impact, and focus on critical regional issues," it said in a statement. "The president thanked the king for Bahrain's strong support for efforts to achieve peace in the Middle East, and for hosting the United States Fifth Fleet." — Reuters

Lebanon hotel closes over economic crisis

BEIRUT: A five-star hotel in Beirut that once hosted royalty and survived the civil war has been forced to close over Lebanon's economic crisis and coronavirus lockdown, its manager said Saturday.

Lebanon is grappling with its worst financial crunch since the 1975-1990 civil war, now compounded by a nationwide lockdown since March 15 to stem the spread of the novel coronavirus. The crisis has pushed the owners of Le Bristol to close down the landmark hotel after almost seven decades in business, its general manager Joseph Coubat said.

"It's because of the economic situation which has become unbearable," he said. "Now with the coronavirus, and with the financial problems we are going through in the country, the level of occupancy has fallen very low," he told AFP, saying it was less than 10 percent.

He said the owners had decided to shut the hotel "while waiting for better days", but that for the moment the closure was definitive. Designed by French interior designer Jean Royere, Le Bristol was first opened in 1951.

It boasts the oldest ballroom in Beirut and once housed Lebanon's first ever skating rink before it was turned into a conference room. Its guests have included the late Shah of Iran Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and his wife Soraya Esfandiary-Bakhtiari, American jazz trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie, and former French pres-

ident Jacques Chirac. Le Bristol never closed during the civil war, when it hosted foreign journalists, though it was shuttered for refurbishment between 2013 and 2015, when owners poured millions of dollars into its renovation.

Between 2004 and 2005, the political opposition met there in what was the first large gathering against the then Syrian presence in Lebanon. The group was dubbed the "Bristol meeting".

Occupancy at the hotel started dropping from October last year, Coubat said, when a crumbling economy and frustration with the political elite led to an unprecedented anti-government street movement. After the COVID-19 pandemic reached the country, the airport's closure from March 19 as part of measures to halt the spread of the virus dealt a further blow to the hospitality sector. Many hotels have zero occupancy at the moment, the head of the hotel owner syndicate has said.

"It's catastrophic. Those in charge now need to really think up a rescue plan," Coubat said, referring to a new government struggling to redress the economy since January. Over the past months, tens of thousands have lost their jobs or part of their salaries in various sectors due to the economic crunch, even as the cost of living has soared.

The value of the Lebanese pound has plummeted by half on the parallel exchange market, and poverty has risen to 45 percent, according to official estimates. With a debt equivalent to 170 percent of its gross domestic product, one of the highest in the world, Lebanon defaulted on its payments for the first time last month. The country has registered 672 cases of COVID-19, including 21 deaths. — AFP



BERLIN: German Economy Minister Peter Altmaier sits next to a screen showing the president of the Federation of German Industries (BDI), Dieter Kempf during a press conference on the economic situation amid the coronavirus pandemic on Saturday in Berlin. — AFP

Germany may rein in virus debt

FRANKFURT: Germany may be able to manage the fiscal impact of the coronavirus crisis without exceeding approved debt levels if the economy recovers in the second half of the year, Finance Minister Olaf Scholz said in an interview published yesterday. Parliament suspended a debt brake to fight the crisis on March 25 with a supplementary budget of 156 billion euro (\$169.67 billion), 100 billion euros for an economic stability fund that can take direct equity stakes in companies, and 100 billion euros in credit to public-sector development bank KfW.

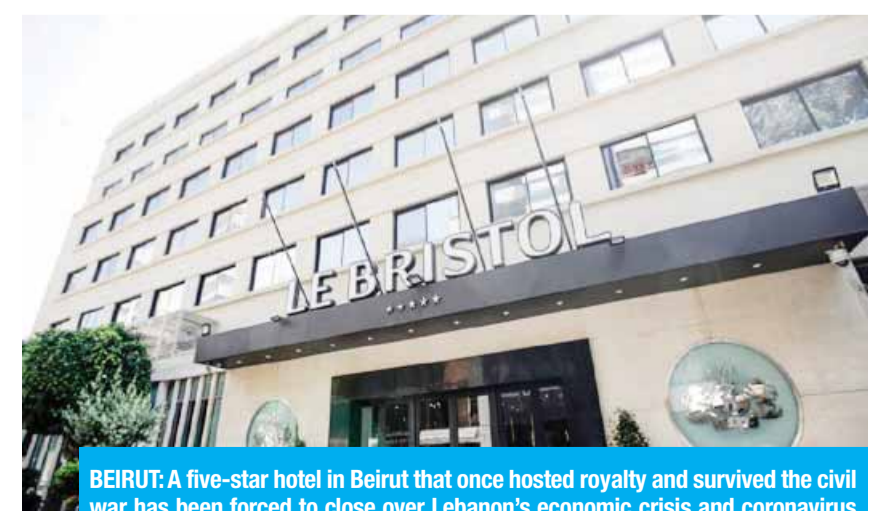
The measures were predominantly aimed at funding healthcare and helping companies. Asked if 156 billion could remain the top level of new debt, Scholz told the Welt am Sonntag newspaper: "If we manage to move the economic curve upwards again in the second half of the year, then this could be the case."

He said that Germany would aim to recover the outlays over a long-term period without having to make substantial savings elsewhere. He praised the country's social welfare system of capitalism that makes a high level of state support possible, but added this meant there could be higher taxation of top earners after the crisis.

A demand by his Social Democratic party in a coalition government led by Chancellor Angela Merkel's conservatives, he said such taxation needed to be "fair and just," supporting lower income groups as well. The government package further includes a stability fund of 400 billion euros in loan guarantees to secure corporate debt at risk of defaulting, taking the overall sum to more than 750 billion euros.

Scholz said that he would aim to provide economic stimuli, if necessary, after the end of the current lockdown policy that keeps businesses shut and the population at home.

"When it is the right time, we will get measures on their way to stimulate business again," he said. "Those will have to be as economists would imagine them - targeted, fit for purpose and limited in time. — Reuters



BEIRUT: A five-star hotel in Beirut that once hosted royalty and survived the civil war has been forced to close over Lebanon's economic crisis and coronavirus lockdown, its manager said Saturday. — AFP

Business

stc distributes free SIM cards to travellers arriving in Kuwait

25,000 allo prepaid cards with 500GB data and 1000 local minutes

KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, distributed 25,000 allo prepaid lines for free to travellers arriving back to Kuwait. stc, in cooperation with Kuwait Airways and the Ministry of Health, greeted returning citizens with a welcome home present allowing them to connect with their loved ones during the isolation period.

The prepaid allo lines distributed will be offering citizens a bundle of 500GB of 4G internet and 1000 local minutes for free with a validity of 30 days upon activation. Users can simply activate the allo prepaid lines by placing the SIM card into their mobile devices, following the instructions on the SIM pack, and immediately connect with their loved ones.

This initiative falls under stc's previously launched "Stay Safe" campaign which aims to support the government's battle against the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic as part of stc's social responsibility framework. stc has launched a series of initiatives and services within this cam-

paign tackling issues that customers and residents are currently facing given the current circumstances in Kuwait.

To better serve its customers, stc upgraded its digital channels to offer the Company's array of products and services to new and existing customers from the comfort of their homes. stc's online platforms also allow customers to seamlessly execute transactions related to their accounts online and hassle free. With the upgrade came a series of online exclusive offers to enrich the customers' experience at home, whether it be online gaming, working remotely from home or enjoying free services to fulfill their entertainment needs.

Commenting on the initiative, CEO of stc, engineer Maziad Al-Harbi, said, "As we globally face the COVID-19 pandemic, stc takes pride in utilizing its resources to contribute towards, and support the activities carried out by the various governmental entities in Kuwait to ensure the health and safety of both citizens and residents alike. We believe that it is stc's social and national responsibility to assist the people of Kuwait in battling this pandemic, while giving back

to our society."

He added, "Within the past month, stc has shifted its operations to adhere to the conditions that were in effect due to COVID-19. Throughout the period, we launched multiple awareness campaigns and enriched our digital channels with products and services to serve all new & existing stc customers, while delivering all purchases to door to reinforce staying safe at home."

Al-Harbi concluded by saying, "We are proud of the supportive and diligent action taken by the local authorities and Kuwaiti government in safely bringing back the Kuwaitis abroad. In our role, stc will continue to maintain strong cooperation and collaborative relationships with the Kuwait government to overcome the current crisis." It is worth mentioning that stc launched its "Stay Safe" campaign with an aim to raise awareness and educate the public on the COVID-19 pandemic through instant news updates, important announcements and precautionary measures to consider. The Company was also amongst the first companies to stand by its customers who were placed in quarantine through its "Far Yet Close" campaign offering



Maziad Al-Harbi



stc in cooperation with KAC greets citizens on arrival

Albania re-opens some businesses

TIRANA: Albania will re-open about 600 business activities from today, ranging from watch repair shops to mining, in a bid to breathe life back into an economy frozen for a month as the country fights the coronavirus outbreak. Prime Minister Edi Rama's government said the low number of deaths and infections, 26 and 548 respectively since the first case detected there on March 9, justified re-starting the economy slowly over the next three weeks.

The government says it will lose 540 million euros (\$587 million) in revenue to June. Some 50,000 workers have lost their jobs over the past month. Government finances had already been hit by having to rebuild homes for 17,000 people who lost theirs in an earthquake in November. The list of businesses able to restart work, published on the e-Albania government website on Saturday, also included farming, fishing, food and fish processing and various kinds of retailer.

Banks, construction firms, call centers, supermarkets, companies transporting goods and clothes makers have remained open throughout the lockdown. However, to make sure social distancing measures are still observed once people begin to return to work, the government threatened offenders with tougher punishment, including jail time for those who opened bars and restaurants and those who leave quarantine while infected. The updated list allows bars and restaurants to deliver take-out food or for customers to collect it.

The government also said it will pardon fines for 7,107 pedestrians who have flouted the rules and give 1,941 drivers back their licenses, arguing they need a second chance. Some complained this made a mockery of those who obeyed the lockdown. While the dusk to dawn curfew and limited hours for shopping will remain in place, pensioners were allowed out of their homes to walk on Saturday for the first time since the lockdown - also for limited hours, and one day only. —Reuters

Brazil economy could recover in Q4, says CB

BRASILIA: Brazil's central bank president Roberto Campos Neto said on Saturday that Latin America's largest economy will begin to recover from the coronavirus crisis in the fourth quarter, according to an interview in local media. Brazil has more coronavirus cases than any other country in Latin America. On Saturday, the health ministry said the number of confirmed cases rose by 2,917 to 36,599. Deaths rose by 206 to 2,347, the ministry said.

"I think the last quarter will show improvement," he said in the interview with website Poder360, which has published a teaser but will publish the interview in full later. "Now the question is the third quarter, to what extent will it be impacted." Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro has repeatedly dismissed the severity of the coronavirus outbreak and criticized social isolation guidelines, arguing that the economic toll will kill more people than the virus.

On Saturday, he repeated this argument in Brasilia, meeting with a small crowd of protesters on the streets and broadcasting the encounter on Facebook Live. He said that Brazil's federal government will be expected to compensate states more than 100 billion reais (\$19.09 billion) in tax revenue lost due to lockdown policies that have negatively affected the economy. But Bolsonaro said there is no room in the country's budget to afford those costs. —Reuters

Ex-US Treasury Secretary O'Neill dies

WASHINGTON, DC: Paul O'Neill, the blunt-spoken former head of Alcoa Corp who was fired after two rocky years as US President George W. Bush's Treasury secretary, died on Saturday at the age of 84 at his home in Pittsburgh, the Wall Street Journal reported.

His family said he had been treated for lung cancer and his death was unrelated to the novel coronavirus, the WSJ reported. O'Neill served as the Republican Bush's first Treasury secretary, from January 2001 to December 2002, during a period of in-fighting within the administration and tough economic times worsened by the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the United States. The multimillionaire former corporate chieftain - he led aluminum company Alcoa from 1987 to 2000 - was not a big fan of Bush's first round of tax cuts. He then argued in vain with others in the administration, including Vice President Dick Cheney, against more cuts that he felt could fuel budget deficits and hurt the economy. He also earned a reputation as a loose cannon as Treasury secretary with comments that at various times infuriated members of Bush's inner circle, fellow Republicans in Congress, Wall Street, Latin American governments and others.

It was Cheney, his friend dating to the 1970s in President Gerald Ford's administration and had recruited

O'Neill into the Treasury job, who told him that he was fired. O'Neill said Cheney had asked him to say his departure was his own decision, but O'Neill refused.

"I'm too old to begin telling lies now," he said.

History bore out his concerns over the Bush tax cuts, which along with the costs of Bush's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan contributed to soaring US budget deficits in subsequent years. Regarding Iraq, O'Neill said Bush's team had decided on a course of war which it then tried to justify by touting the threat posed by Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction. After the invasion, no such weapons were found.

'Finding a way'

"From the start, we were building the case against Hussein and looking at how we could take him out and change Iraq into a new country," O'Neill said in the 2004 book "The Price of Loyalty" by journalist Ron Suskind. "And, if we did that, it would solve everything. It was about finding a way to do it."

Asked in 2008 whether he felt bitter about his time in the Bush administration, O'Neill told the New York Times: "No. I'm thankful I got fired when I did so that I didn't have to be associated with what they subsequently did." During his stint as Treasury secretary O'Neill outraged congressional Republicans by calling one of their tax cut measures "show business." He annoyed others in the administration by telling lawmakers that Bush's signature tax cut drive was not likely to boost the economy in the short term.

UK health service counts the cost of funding cuts

LONDON: Britain's state-run National Health Service, described by Prime Minister Boris Johnson as the country's "beating heart" after saving his life, is creaking under the strain of coronavirus after a decade of underinvestment. While millions across the country take to the streets each week to applaud cherished health workers, doctors and nurses are warning that they are being left to fight the virus without proper protective equipment.

That, along with insufficient COVID-19 testing across Britain, is blamed by experts on a decade of underinvestment following the global financial crisis. "The UK National Health Service is acknowledged to have suffered from a funding crisis since 2010," Elias Mossialos, professor of health policy at the London School of Economics, told AFP. "NHS expenditure is 7.6 percent of (Britain's) GDP, which is approximately the same as it was in 2012."

Mossialos said a slowdown in annual NHS budget increases "has hindered the preparedness and response to coronavirus".

£34 billion more

Ahead of their general election victory in December, Johnson's Conservatives pledged to boost NHS funding by £34 billion (\$41.9 billion,

38.4 billion euros). But because the figure covers a four-year period until 2024, inflation could take a large bite out of the sum.

The new government has also promised 50,000 more nurses through better retention and new recruits, as well as an additional 6,000 doctors. New hospitals have also been pledged, but people did not count on one being built so soon.

Earlier this month, Britain opened a temporary 4,000-bed hospital to treat the most seriously ill coronavirus patients - the Nightingale in London. While Johnson's recent experience might prompt him to pump more money than promised into the NHS, experts say a big problem lies in Britain's largest employer struggling to recruit staff.

That could even worsen following the country's exit from the European Union.

The NHS, which claims to be Europe's biggest employer with a staff of more than 1.3 million, currently has around 100,000 vacancies. Britain's government has responded to the pandemic by asking doctors and nurses to come out of retirement, even if many fall into the category of being highly at risk of catching the virus.

"In terms of nurses, the UK is one of very few OECD countries where the number of nurses has been going down," said Franco Sassi, professor of international health policy at Imperial College London.

The NHS suffers also from a severe shortage of beds, according to Mossialos.

OECD data reveals that the UK has



In this file photo taken on January 30, 2001 US President George W Bush looks on (left), as Secretary of the Treasury Paul O'Neill (right) is sworn in by Vice President Dick Cheney (center) in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington, D.C. —AFP

He dismissed stock, bond and currency traders as "people who sit in front of flickering green screens" whose jobs he could master in "a couple of weeks." Brazil's government protested after O'Neill worried publicly that money lent to Latin American countries would vanish into Swiss bank accounts.

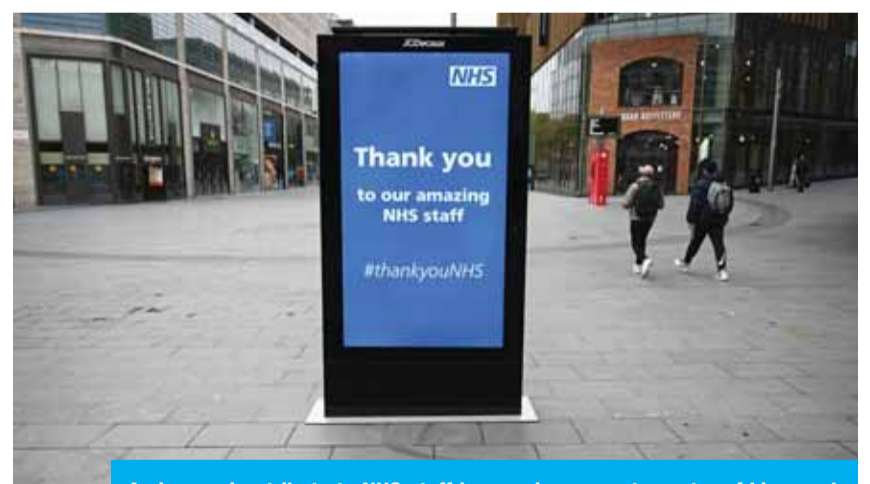
He also irked Wall Street with overly optimistic assessments of the economy including an errant forecast after the 2001 attacks that the stock market would swiftly bounce back. His comment that the administration was not interested in pursuing a strong-dollar policy rattled global currency markets.

O'Neill was born on Dec. 4, 1935, in St. Louis to a family of modest means. After college, he began his career in government in 1961, work-

ing for the Veterans Administration. He was named as the No. 2 official in the White House budget office in 1974 and became friends with fellow Ford administration officials Cheney and Alan Greenspan, the future Fed chairman.

After Ford lost his 1976 re-election bid, O'Neill joined International Paper Co, eventually becoming its president. Greenspan served on Alcoa's board when the aluminum company was searching for a new leader, and recruited O'Neill.

O'Neill served as both chairman and CEO of Alcoa from 1987 to 1999 - increasing its profit, stock price and market share - and retired as chairman in 2000. His Alcoa stock and options exceeded \$100 million by the time he left. O'Neill and his wife, Nancy, had four children. —Reuters



A sign paying tribute to NHS staff is seen in an empty centre of Liverpool, northwest England, on April 18, 2020 during the coronavirus pandemic. The number of people in Britain who have died in hospital from coronavirus has risen by 888 to 15,464, according to daily health ministry figures on Saturday. —AFP

only 2.5 beds per 1,000 people, compared with six per 1,000 in France and eight per 1,000 in Germany, he said. The UK meanwhile has around 6.6 critical care beds per 100,000 — around half France's total and around five times fewer than in Germany.

NHS appreciation

News bulletins show NHS nurses in good spirits, applauding and making guards of honour for patients who have beaten the virus that has so far claimed more than 15,400 lives in Britain. But the fact is that most have been left exhausted. "We will see the effect at the other side of the epidemic," said Fiona Johnson, spokeswoman for the health think tank Nuffield Trust.

"You have an exhausted workforce," she said, noting also that many operations had been postponed to allow hospitals to deal with coronavirus patients.

Britons are making a point of paying tribute to the NHS, which was set up in 1948 and has long been a cherished institution. At 1900 GMT each Thursday, people come out of their homes to show their appreciation for its staff and Britain's other key workers, by applauding for a couple of minutes. Children are seen banging frying pans.

Meanwhile, a 99-year-old British World War II veteran, Tom Moore, on Thursday completed 100 laps of his garden in a fundraising challenge for healthcare staff, raising around £20 million. —AFP

America's love affair with an elderly epidemiologist

WASHINGTON: Anthony Fauci is everywhere these days - not just as the straight-talking coronavirus point man at President Donald Trump's daily pandemic briefings but on T-shirts, coffee mugs and, yes, even donuts. Indeed, for many, the diminutive 79-year-old epidemiologist with a heavy Brooklyn accent is the country's new hero - a no-nonsense scientist speaking truth to a terrified nation led by a president who sometimes has a loose grasp of the facts.

Nick Semeraro, owner of Donuts Delite in Rochester, New York, is just one of the business owners paying tribute to the doctor - and simultaneously cashing in on Fauci-mania. Semeraro is churning out donuts that feature a picture of Fauci on edible paper where the hole should be - his way of honoring the government's top infectious disease expert.

"I've never met a guy so admired by so many people. I have never heard one negative comment about him," Semeraro said. "In my opinion, he was like a cool calm voice in chaos," he said of Fauci's behavior at Trump's daily coronavirus briefings, which can morph from a recounting of scientific facts into something more like a campaign rally. Semeraro said demand for his treats is so high that he has had to open up extra telephone lines, and is now shipping the Fauci donuts across the country.

'In Fauci We Trust'

Fauci's craggy, bespectacled face is showing up elsewhere, too: on T-shirts with the slogan "In Fauci We Trust" and on coffee mugs with the line "Keep calm and wash your hands." Americans can even

buy Fauci socks and candles. Online marketplace Etsy now offers more than 3,000 items dedicated to the doctor, who has been in the public eye for decades. On Facebook, the "Dr Anthony Fauci Fan Club" has more than 79,000 members.

A video game called "Fauci's Revenge" has lasers shooting out of his eyes to help defeat the virus. And in the US capital, one restaurant is selling the "Fauci Pouchy" - cocktails in a pouch with a straw, for pick-up and delivery, of course, in these days of the Great Lockdown. The original is made with vodka, lemonade, elderflower and grapefruit juice. "They're selling out like crazy," said Rohit Malhotra, beverage director at Capo Italian Deli in Washington, which has a backroom speakeasy. "Our highest was around 300 in a day."

'Sense and science'

Probably no one expected this soft-spoken man who first rose to prominence during the AIDS crisis in the 1980s to become a pop culture icon. With his frequent White House appearances, Fauci has been "propelled into everyone's consciousness," said Robert Thompson, a expert on television and popular culture at Syracuse University in New York. Fauci is all over social media, giving live interviews in his raspy voice on Snapchat, answering questions from basketball star Stephen Curry on Instagram and talking to late night funnyman Trevor Noah on YouTube. Many Americans like Fauci because of his direct way of explaining a world that has been transformed by the pandemic.

He is often in the excruciating position of having to gently correct things Trump says as the president stands next to him, glowering. "In a moment of crisis like this, Americans are desperate for heroes," said Julian Zelizer, a professor of history and public affairs at Princeton University. "Even in a difficult political environment, Fauci has insisted on speaking the truth - even with an angry president standing besides him," said Zelizer. For Thompson, "he seems to be talking sense and science."

'God bless his soul'

Tony Mastrangelo, who drove three hours to buy Fauci donuts in Rochester, said the doctor "is very honest and doesn't spin anything a certain way. He doesn't have an agenda which I think is awesome." "He reminds me of my grandpa. God bless his soul. He was a little Italian guy who was just honest. And that's how I think Fauci is," said Mastrangelo. But Fauci has also earned himself enemies among US conservatives for correcting Trump.

He has been the target of insults on social media, which led the government to boost the security around him. Trump himself retweeted a tweet with a #FireFauci hashtag, but said later he has confidence in him and called him a "fantastic guy." Amid all the love and hate, Fauci remains stoic. When asked about a petition drive to have him declared People magazine's Sexiest Man Alive for 2020, he replied: "When they show this to me at my age, I say, 'Where were you when I was 30?'" So far, more than 18,000 people have signed the petition. — AFP

Lonely elderly face solitude even if they escape coronavirus

BRUSSELS: The global coronavirus epidemic is stalking the quiet halls of Europe's care homes for the elderly, a silent threat with sadness and isolation in its wake. Separated from relatives for fear of their spreading infection - and from neighbors who have already fallen to the outbreak - some retirees fear death from loneliness. And the slow tragedy is also taking a toll on carers, like Shirley Doyen, head nurse at the Residence Christalain, just outside Brussels. "If the lockdown goes on for a few more months, we could lose more residents to solitude than to COVID," she says, referring to the infection spread by the novel coronavirus.

The Christalain has already seen 13 deaths among only 120 residents since Belgium declared a national lockdown in mid-March - more than the two to three in a typical month. Not all the fatalities have been directly ascribed to the epidemic, since testing is limited. Of Belgium's 5,453 official coronavirus deaths, 2,772 have been in retirement homes. Without more tests, it is impossible to know when it will be safe for resi-

dents to receive visitors again, or even to leave their rooms to socialize in shared lounges and dining rooms.

"It has been a month that residents have been stuck in their bedrooms. It's high time we reopened the canteen," 42-year-old Doyen told AFP, during a carefully controlled visit. Long-standing resident Marc Parmentier, 90, is getting a test - Doyen gently takes a nasal swab to send off to the lab - but he can't hide his sadness. "It's gloomy to not be able to see anyone. To be all alone. You fear the worst in moments like these," he said. "Before, I would eat out, go to friends' houses, pass the time. Now we're really... locked down, as they say."

There has been some controversy in Belgium about when to allow families to once again visit their elderly relatives in retirement homes and to ease their psychological isolation. Last week government officials suggested this might be possible soon, only to quickly make a U-turn. At the Christalain they think that, while the loneliness is painful, the time is not right. — AFP

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John Legend and Chrissy Teigen buy new home

John Legend and Chrissy Teigen have splashed out over \$5 million on a new house. The couple - who have children Luna, four, and Miles, 23 months, together - have splurged \$5.1 million on a 3,440 sq. ft abode that is situated very close to their current home in Beverly Hills. Work on the "organic modern" property has just been complete and the wood and glass building features a Smart Home system to control the home's lights, audio and cameras from afar, while the luxury kitchen - which joins onto a spacious living room - boasts high-end Miele appliances and a large countertop. According to Dirt, there is a small back-

yard featuring a plunge pool with attached spa, a grass lawn and covered loggias for outdoor dining, and there are also floating upstairs gardens with a built-in irrigation system. The house includes four bedrooms - including a master suite with a private balcony - and four bathrooms but it's unclear if and when the famous family are planning to move into it, or if they have bought it for other purposes. Meanwhile, John recently admitted his kids' upbringing is very different to his own and he's doing his best to make sure they're not spoiled. He said: "They're growing up in a very rarefied space, one that I don't

have an experience dealing with as a child. I always try to figure out a way to make sure they're not a**holes." The 'All of Me' hitmaker has experienced touring both on his own as a bachelor as well as with his family and is excited for the kids to join him on tour as he likes seeing the "world through their eyes". He added: "I've toured through the different phases of my life, [from] being a bachelor in my mid-twenties, to being a forty-year-old husband with two young kids. I love bringing the family along and I'm excited to have them with me on the tour bus. It's fun to see the world through their eyes."

The Rock's daughter demands he sing along to his Moana character 'For the 937th Time'

Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson's daughter loves 'Moana' - but has "no idea" he voiced Maui. The 47-year-old star - who has Simone, 18, with ex-wife Dany Garcia and Jasmine, four, and Tiana, two, with spouse Lauren Hashian - regularly sings along to the soundtrack of the animated movie to please his kids, but he admitted his youngest daughter doesn't realize how authentic his renditions are. Dwayne shared a video of himself and Tiana as they enjoyed the songs and captioned the clip on Instagram: "And for the 937th time today she wants daddy to sing along with Maui. "She has no idea, we're the same person." The former wrestler sent his support to every day due to the coronavirus pandemic. He added: "And I

have no idea what day it is anymore, but I am sure it's one that ends with Y. "To all the mama and papa bears out there going thru it - we understand. 24hr parenting. Get your sleep and cocktails when you can. #BringItOnBaby (sic)" Earlier this month, The Rock shared another video of himself singing 'You're Welcome' with Tiana as he taught her the best way to properly wash her hands as he had found the track offered "perfect timing" for the task. He wrote alongside the video: "Before my showers now, Baby Tia (mama mia) demands I sing the rap portion of my song 'You're Welcome' from MOANA, while I wash her hands. "We realized a few weeks ago that the rap portion of the song is perfect timing when getting your little ones to have fun washing their hands.(sic)"



Kelly Clarkson's life is 'insane' at the moment

The 'I Dare You' singer admitted life at home with husband Brandon Blackstock and their kids River, five, and Remy, four, has been "chaotic" while self-quarantining due to the coronavirus pandemic because the children keep "losing it" over their school work and she's multitasking with work and chores. Speaking on 'Today', Kelly said: "Nine times out of 10, my kids are losing it 'cause they have to do school, which is somehow a shock every day, as well as nap time. It's super fun. "And I'm cooking all the time and cleaning all the time while doing work for several things. It's, like—it's the most insane thing ever, honestly." Fortunately, Kelly has found some relief to get her through. She quipped: "And I drink a bit of wine, but we're hanging in there, so it's good." The 37-year-old star admitted she's been finding it difficult feeling "trapped" at home and having to stay away from other people. She said: "Patience isn't a virtue that I hold. I like to stay passionate. "I make jokes and I smile a lot and everything, especially with my show, too, 'cause we're doing 'The Voice' and 'The Kelly Clarkson Show', but it is a very hard thing for such an extrovert that is used to living a schedule every day, there are lots of us that are so used to certain schedules and, like, man, just being trapped and not supposed to be around people is a very kind of damaging thing to your psyche." Kelly hopes her new single, 'I Dare You', offers the "perfect message" to what people are experiencing now. She said: "In all seriousness, it is funny with the kids and it is hard doing the teaching and all those kinds of things, but it can be depressing, this kind of isolation. "It can be a little dark for everyone and there's a lot of uncertainty. We felt like the message before the pandemic, we thought it was a globally connecting environment, the message, but now even more so."



Sam Smith's lockdown dating apps

Sam Smith turned to dating apps during the first two weeks of lockdown after they panicked about being single. The 27-year-old singer is currently quarantining at home in the UK with their sister and admitted they freaked out about their single status when the Covid-19 lockdown was first introduced. Speaking to Rob Howard and Lauren Layfield on Capital Breakfast, Sam explained: "For the first two weeks I was like 'oh my god I'm single, I need to like...'. I went on this dating thing and it was the worst! "And then you get attached to guys, and then you're forming quarantine relationships over the phone, it's a dangerous path "It is a little bit [difficult], it's just not going to work right now!" Meanwhile, Sam also responded to criticism after they shared pictures of themselves having a quarantine meltdown on the steps of their lavish mansion after lockdown restrictions were first introduced in the UK, in a bid to slow the spread of the deadly Covid-19 virus. In an interview with Jamie Theakston and Amanda Holden on Heart Breakfast, Sam said: "It was six weeks ago I posted a picture and everyone else was posting pictures, it was probably bad timing of me, but I use my social media as if it's just my friends on it. "I posted with my humor and stuff, but it just didn't get picked up very well, but I didn't mean any malice by it at all. "You know me, I'm always sharing all of my feelings all the time and trying to be as human as possible but sometimes maybe people can read it wrongly but that wasn't really meaning it in a malicious or nasty way. I was just trying to be myself." Tune in to Heart Breakfast with Jamie Theakston and Amanda Holden weekdays from 06:30 - 10:00 and Capital Breakfast with Roman Kemp, weekdays from 6:30am - 10am across the UK.



How Willis got stuck in quarantine with his ex-wife Moore?

Bruce Willis got "stuck" in Idaho so had to quarantine with his ex-wife Demi Moore. The 'Die Hard' actor still has a good relationship with his former spouse so has been staying with her and their three daughters Rumer, 31, Scout, 28, and 26-year-old Tallulah, during the coronavirus pandemic, while his wife Emma Heming is in Los Angeles with their two kids, Mabel, eight, and Evelyn, five. An insider explained Bruce's entire family originally planned to join him until there was an outbreak of the virus in the area. The source explained: "He has a house directly across the street from Demi's house in Sun Valley. It's been for sale for years. He was visiting and his family was considering quarantining there. He got stuck because Sun Valley became one of the COVID-19 hotspots." The 65-year-old actor - who split from Demi in 2000 after 13 years of marriage - is in touch with Emma and their kids "daily" and none of them are finding the unusual domestic set up particularly "weird". The insider told 'Entertainment Tonight': "Bruce and Demi made a decision to quarantine together with their children and have been doing so for over a month. The family didn't want to take any risks of outside influences so they've stayed away from socializing with anyone but their family. "Bruce isn't with his wife or young children, but that was understood going into this. "Bruce, Demi and Emma have always had a great relationship and are good friends and none of this is weird to them. It's outside people who are making it more than it is." While Bruce and Demi "never thought they would be forced at this age to stay in one home together 24/7", they are having a lot of fun with their daughters. A source said: "It's become a slumber party and they have settled in perfectly. "Emma loves Bruce and is fine with him staying with his older children and Demi during this time."

Matthew Morrison's daily 'dance party'

Matthew Morrison starts every day with a "dance party" with his wife and son. The former 'Glee' actor has been married to Renee Puente since 2014 and the pair have son Revel, two, together and Matthew revealed they all have an energetic start to their day. He told Us Weekly: "I wake up and have my morning meditation. I journal and have a dance party with my wife and son, every day!" Matthew and Renee met at a Grammy Awards party and revealed they got serious very quickly. He explained: "I met my wife at a Grammy party. We saw each other across a crowded room and smiled. "Renee and I fell in love quickly, and three months later she was living on a tour bus with me. With close quarters, you know quickly if you're compatible!" Meanwhile, Matthew recently revealed he is a "romantic man" who loves to shower his spouse with love, because he believes maintaining the spark in a marriage is important. He said: "I am a romantic man and love keeping the romance alive. I think it's so easy when you're falling in love with someone, but keeping the romance alive over a long relationship is the hard part, and that's where the work needs to come in. "Fortunately, I don't feel like it's work for me. I'm always going to find ways to shower my partner with love." Matthew also said that welcoming their son into the world in October 2017 was one of the "most romantic things" they've ever done. Asked for an example of his romantic gestures, the 41-year-old star said: "Well I gave her a baby! That's a good love gift. I think the most romantic thing I have done is to just travel. I love seeing the world with my wife, and I like surprising her with trips when she doesn't know where we are going. "We'll show up to an airport and I'll try and keep it a surprise for as long as possible, sitting at the wrong gate until the real flight is about to take off, cutting it super fine. Then I'm instantly thinking of the next romantic gesture. "I want to be an example to guys on how to romance their woman. I could start doing seminars on the side. Any guys who need my help, send me a message."



Lohan reveals what lockdown life is like in Dubai

Lindsay Lohan needs a permit to go to the supermarket during the coronavirus lockdown in Dubai. The 33-year-old actress - who lives in the United Arab Emirates city - has been locked inside her home as the government guidelines in Dubai are "very strict" and residents can be fined for leaving their home without a valid reason. Appearing via video call on 'Lights Out with David Spade', she explained: "It is very strict here. You are not allowed outside, they take it very seriously." The 'Back To Me' singer also revealed residents are being reprimanded if they are caught breaking any of the regulations. She said: "Just one person can go out of the house at a time. If you don't have a reason or aren't approved for a permit to go to the supermarket, are found without gloves or a mask, or surpass 90 minutes." Lindsay moved to Dubai six years ago and travels between the Middle East and her family home in New York, but hasn't been back to her old home in Los Angeles in 10 years after the paparazzi scared her off. She said: "I live here, yep, I have been here for about six years. But I go to New York a lot to see my family ... and I was in London before this. I haven't been to LA in over 10 years. "The paparazzi definitely scared me a lot [in LA], but I haven't had any real reasons to [come back] recently." However, since the release of her new song, Lindsay was planning to travel to the US on her promotional tour before the virus. Though she previously revealed she is planning to leave the UAE to revive her acting career and is hoping to star in a sequel to her hit film 'Mean Girls' with the original cast and writer Tina Fey. She said: "I was hanging on to [Mean Girls] for a really long time. I wanted to come back with a 'Mean Girls 2'. With the same cast, and work with Tina [Fey] ... that was really what I wanted. I was really excited to do that. That's all in their hands really."



Sharon Stone's Covid-19 party fears

Sharon Stone had doctors checking people's temperatures at her birthday bash. The actress celebrated her 62nd birthday with a lavish party on March 8 and although social distancing measures had not been introduced to the USA at that time, she was so concerned about the coronavirus that she enlisted medical professionals to help monitor her guests. Sharon explained to Naomi Campbell on the supermodel's 'No Filter' YouTube series: "I had a doctor and a nurse come early and check all of the catering people, and the wait staff as they arrived to make sure none of the food and the people working there were fevering or ill. "And then I had a nurse at the door taking temperature, and this was March 8th. I just thought we had to be super careful. "People thought I was a little extreme. That I was a little bit crazy." Sharon also revealed she knew that Covid-19 would be a global crisis after she met playwright John Dempsey at Sir Elton John's Oscars bash in February and he told her what friends of his were going through in China, where the virus originated. She said: "When I saw John Dempsey at Elton's Oscar party, I just looked at his face and he said, '40 per cent of our business is crashing and I'm losing friends in China'. And I looked at him and knew, 'Oh my God. This is about to become a global epidemic'. "[I] called my lawyer, canceled my global events. The people said they were going to sue me. I said, 'They won't'. And my lawyer said, 'Oh they're going to'. And I said, 'They won't have time to. It will be okay.' Our lawyer said, 'Oh no it's going to be terrible', and I'm like, 'Don't worry about it.'—BangShowbiz



Lifestyle | Feature



In this screengrab, Jimmy Fallon (center) sings with musical group The Roots and frontline medical workers during "One World: Together At Home" presented by Global Citizen on Saturday.—AFP photos

Virtual mega-concert featuring Stones, Swift celebrates health workers

A virtual concert packed with A-listers — from The Rolling Stones to Taylor Swift to Billie Eilish — entertained fans around the world with a show celebrating health workers, as billions shelter at home due to coronavirus. Lizzo, Jennifer Lopez, Stevie Wonder, Paul McCartney and LL Cool J also joined in the Lady Gaga-curated online party, which was backed by the international advocacy organization Global Citizen in partnership with the World Health Organization. Before opening the show Lady Gaga — who began working with Global Citizen and the WHO weeks ago to fundraise for the battle against COVID-19 — said she was praying for medical workers and also "thinking of all of you that are at home, who are wondering when this is all going to be different."

"What I'd like to do tonight, if I can, is just give you the permission to, for a moment — smile," she said as she broke into a rendition of Nat King Cole's "Smile." Stevie Wonder then wowed with a tribute to the late soul legend Bill Withers. Sitting at his home piano Wonder, who turns 70 next month, played "Lean On Me" before launching into his own "Love's In Need Of Love Today" in his singular crystal-clear voice. Mick Jagger also appeared ageless despite his 76 years as he delivered the classic "You Can't Always Get What You Want," as his fellow Stones played from their respective homes, including a grinning Charlie Watts on the air drums.

Also at her piano Swift played the vulnerable "Soon You'll Get Better," which the pop phenom wrote about her mother's struggles with cancer. Global Citizen intended the primetime event broadcast on major television networks worldwide — and hosted by American late-night television personalities Jimmy Fallon, Jimmy Kimmel and Stephen Colbert — not as a fundraiser but as a moment of unity through song.

They also planned it as a "rallying cry" to support health workers, while coronavirus has at least 4.5 billion people forced or urged to stay home. Prior to the event Global Citizen began urging philanthropists, companies and governments to support the WHO in its coronavirus response efforts, saying it has raised \$35 million for local organizations and the international health body's COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund.

'True heroes'

In addition to performances — McCartney played "Lady Madonna," as Lizzo belted out a powerful version of "A Change Is Gonna Come" — the event highlighted the efforts of essential workers worldwide,



In this screengrab, Mick Jagger, Keith Richards, Ronnie Wood and Charlie Watts of musical group "The Rolling Stones" perform during "One World: Together At Home" presented by Global Citizen.

including medical personnel and those delivering food and sanitary products to vulnerable populations. None other than Queen Bey herself joined in to thank "true heroes" who are "away from their families, taking care of ours." Beyonce, a Houston native, also emphasized that the coronavirus pandemic in the United States is disproportionately affecting black Americans, who make up a large part of "essential parts of the workforce that do not have the luxury of working from home," she said.

Indian actor Shah Rukh Khan and Nigerian singer Burna Boy were among the participants in the event that included former US first ladies Michelle Obama and Laura Bush as well as media personality and philanthropist Oprah. British actor Idris Elba — who was diagnosed with and recovered from coronavirus — also took part. "Tonight, through the universal language of music, we salute the bravery and sacrifice of health heroes and others," said UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres in a clip played during the broadcast. "And please join our call for a global ceasefire to focus on our common enemy — the virus." The show closed with a moving harmony of Celine Dion, Lady Gaga,

Andrea Bocelli and John Legend performing Dion and Bocelli's 1999 hit duet "The Prayer," as renowned concert pianist Lang Lang accompanied.

'Serve humanity'

Saturday's online festivities kicked off with a six-hour pre-show streamed online, with stars across the globe including Christine and the Queens, Jennifer Hudson, Matthew McConaughey, Luis Fonsi and Kesha making appearances. Soccer phenom David Beckham held a video chat with young athletes, encouraging them to keep honing their skills at home with sporting events canceled indefinitely. Adam Lambert performed a rendition of Tears for Fears' hit "Mad World," while The Killers delivered a stripped-back version of "Mr. Brightside" and Hong Kong icon Eason Chan played John Lennon's "Love."

And New Yorker Sarah Jessica Parker of "Sex and the City" fame gave a shout out from her couch to medical workers toiling at the city's particularly hard-hit hospital Elmhurst. Hospital workers also gave testimony on their vital work battling the virus. Dressed in scrubs, Aisha al Muntheri spoke from Paris to say she



In this screengrab, Stevie Wonder performs during "One World: Together At Home".



In this screengrab, Celine Dion performs during "One World: Together At Home".



In this screengrab, Taylor Swift performs during "One World: Together At Home".

was proud to serve "on the front lines with my colleagues." "It's part of our value in medicine to serve humanity," she said. "The humanity is our common language." —AFP



In this screengrab, Billie Eilish performs during "One World: Together At Home".



In this screengrab, Pharrell Williams speaks during "One World: Together At Home".



In this screengrab, Shah Rukh Khan speaks during "One World: Together At Home".



In this screengrab, Jennifer Lopez performs during "One World: Together At Home".



In this screengrab, Oprah Winfrey speaks during "One World: Together At Home".



In this screengrab, Lady Gaga performs during "One World: Together At Home".



In this screengrab, Keith Urban performs during "One World: Together At Home".



In this screengrab, Shawn Mendes and Camila Cabello perform during "One World: Together At Home".

Dubai opens 3,000-bed field hospital for virus response

Fine for spreading false info • India sends HCQ to UAE • Saudi: Pray at home

DUBAI: Dubai opened a 3,000-bed capacity field hospital on Saturday in its World Trade Centre to prepare for a potential surge in novel coronavirus cases. The towering event and exhibition center is located in the heart of the city, one of the seven members of the United Arab Emirates. The hospital will reinforce Dubai's healthcare system and "take advantage of all resources and infrastructure to fight the COVID-19 pandemic", said a statement from the emirate's media office said. The hospital has a capacity that can be expanded quickly to over 3,000 beds, the statement added.

The UAE has imposed strict social distancing measures and a night-time curfew to combat the spread of the virus. State news agency WAM reported on Saturday the UAE will fine people up to 20,000 dirhams (\$5,500) if they share medical information about the coronavirus that contradicts official statements. The move appears to be aimed at containing the spread of misinformation and rumors related to the COVID-19 outbreak that has claimed 37 lives in the state, with 6,300 confirmed infections as of Friday.

"It is forbidden for any individual to publish, republish or circulate medical information or guidance which is false, misleading or which hasn't been announced officially ... using print, audiovisual or social media, or online websites or any other way of publication or circulation," WAM reported, citing the government directive. The text of the government decision refers only to "individuals", without specifying whether journalists and media professionals are included.

Meanwhile, India has agreed to send hydroxy-chloroquine tablets to the United Arab Emirates to be used for treating COVID-19 patients, the state's embassy in New Delhi said. India last month put a ban on exports as sales soared to secure supplies for itself as US President Donald Trump touted the drug

as a potential effective treatment for the deadly virus. It said this month it would send supplies to some countries. "The first shipment of medicine, currently on its way to the UAE, includes 5.5 million pills for treatment of patients with COVID-19," the embassy tweeted late on Saturday.

Saudi Arabia's highest religious body, the Council of Senior Scholars, urged Muslims worldwide to pray at home during Ramadan if their countries require social distancing to curb the spread of the coronavirus, state news agency SPA reported yesterday. The holy fasting month of Ramadan begins later this week. During the month, believers usually break their fast with families and friends and perform an evening prayer, known as taraweeh, in large gatherings at mosques.

"Muslims shall avoid gatherings, because they are the main cause of the spread of infection...and shall remember that preserving the lives of people is a great act that brings them closer to God," it said in a statement. The kingdom's Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdulaziz Al-Sheikh on Friday expressed the same sentiment, saying that Muslim prayers during Ramadan and for the subsequent Eid al-Fitr feast should be performed at home if the coronavirus outbreak continues.

Saudi Arabia has reported 8,274 cases of COVID-19, the respiratory disease caused by the new coronavirus, and 92 deaths so far, the highest among the six Gulf Arab states where the total has reached 24,374 with 156 deaths. The Saudi government in mid-March stopped people performing their five daily prayers and the weekly Friday prayer inside mosques as part of efforts to limit the spread of the coronavirus. Last week, the Prophet's Mosque in the holy city of Madinah said it was banning events that dispense evening meals in the mosque to those in need during Ramadan to break their daily fast. — Agencies



DUBAI: Dubai's Crown Prince Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed Al-Maktoum inspects a field hospital at the Dubai World Trade Center during its inauguration ceremony on Saturday. —AFP

Tehran reopens as economic hardship trumps virus risks

TEHRAN: Iran allowed some shuttered Tehran businesses to reopen Saturday despite the Middle East's deadliest coronavirus outbreak, as many faced a bitter choice between risking infection and economic ruin. Top officials argue that Iran's sanctions-hit economy cannot afford to remain on lockdown, and approved similar measures in other provinces last week. There was a "significant" uptick in highway use on Saturday, according to Tehran's traffic police chief, who told state TV that some anti-congestion measures had been lifted to discourage use of public transportation.

Some Tehran residents said they were concerned about the outbreak but had to go back to work as their livelihoods depended on it. "I don't think it's safe yet," said Reza Jafari, a salesman at a handbag wholesaler in the capital. "But I had to get back to work for financial reasons. If I had the option I wouldn't, but if the shop remains closed longer we could get laid off." Jafari, speaking by telephone,

said retailers from other provinces had flocked to the store on Saturday to refresh their stocks, and that most shopkeepers and customers did not wear masks or gloves.

At the nearby Grand Bazaar, many shopkeepers sat on the steps of closed stalls, saying they were not allowed to reopen until May 1. They protested what they saw as a double standard, with shops outside the bazaar working while they remain barred from reopening. "How can I stay keep staying home? My family is hungry," said Hamdollah Mahmoudi, 45, a shop worker in the bazaar. "And one gets mentally sick without work". Morteza, 30, said he was unable to open his stall despite pressure from creditors. "This is the second stage of coronavirus for me," he said. "I would be better off dead now."

'Smart social distancing'

Hit by an outbreak of the COVID-19 illness that has now killed over 5,000 people and infected over 80,000 according to official figures, Iran shut down all non-essential economic activity in mid-March. Some abroad and many inside Iran, including officials and health experts, have said the casualty figures may be higher than the official count. But authorities now argue it is possible to battle the virus and reopen the economy at the same time with

shared information about the pathogen with the World Health Organization in early January. But this week the United States has brought the rumors into the mainstream, with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo saying US officials are doing a "full investigation" into how the virus "got out into the world".

When asked if the research suggested the virus could have come from the institute, Yuan said: "I know it's impossible." "As people who carry out viral studies we clearly know what kind of research is going on at the institute and how the institute manages viruses and samples," he said. He said that because the P4 laboratory is in Wuhan "people can't help but make associations", but that some media outlets are "deliberately trying to mislead people".

Reports in the Washington Post and Fox News have both quoted anonymous sources who voiced concern that the virus may have come - accidentally - from the facility. Yuan said the reports were "entirely based on speculation" without "evidence or knowledge". Authorities in Wuhan initially tried to cover up the outbreak and there have been questions about the official tally of infections with the government repeatedly changing its counting criteria at the peak of the outbreak. This week authorities in the city admitted mistakes in counting its death toll and abruptly raised the figure by 50 percent. — AFP

He said that almost all shops and companies were forced to shut down as countries imposed curfews and lockdowns to combat the deadly disease. In his proposal, Damkhi called on the Islamic endowment department, which owns and manages scores of buildings, to completely or partially waive rentals of its real estate for a limited period as a kind of help to tenants. He also called for launching an awareness campaign to urge landlords to do the same. Already, hundreds of landlords in Kuwait have substantially cut rents to help affected tenants, a majority of them expatriates.

Fifteen Kuwaiti lawmakers, most of them from the opposition, have sent a petition to HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah appealing him to pardon a group of former opposition MPs and activists who have been living in exile for almost two years. The ex-MPs and activists fled to Turkey in the summer of 2018, just before Kuwait's cassation court passed jail terms against them for storming the National Assembly building in a protest in 2011. The lawmakers said that due to the spread of the coronavirus all over the world, it becomes urgent to allow Kuwaiti citizens to return.

"smart social distancing" measures.

Businesses seeking to reopen have to register online with the health ministry and then receive guidelines for staying safe. They are then given a QR code to print and show to officials inspecting their premises, said Jafari, adding that he had registered. But he said he was skeptical officials could enforce sanitary guidelines, saying shopkeepers would don masks temporarily then relax when inspectors leave.

'Forced to go back'

The decision to reopen "low-risk" businesses has drawn criticism from health experts and even some government officials, but President Hassan Rouhani has insisted "there is no other way". Iran's economy has been battered by Washington's re-imposition of crippling sanctions since 2018 - a situation compounded by plummeting global oil prices and shrinking tax revenues as the coronavirus lockdown took hold. According to the International Monetary Fund, the Iranian economy shrank by 7.6 percent in 2019 and is expected to contract a further 6 percent this year.

Small retailers were hit particularly hard as the pandemic overshadowed the Iranian New Year shopping season. But on Saturday, an AFP reporter

saw an uptown clothing boutique doing a brisk trade, with masked and gloved assistants attending to customers without protective gear. Photos published by ISNA news agency showed crowds of people without masks crowding government offices in Tehran, reportedly to sign up for state loans. A bank clerk said her branch in northern Tehran had received more customers on Saturday than in recent weeks, mostly businessmen.

But Tehran residents interviewed by AFP talked both of economic distress and fear of catching the virus. "Everyone were hoping for good sales this year, and now they've hit a brick wall," said optometrist Kawan Ghane, who owns an eyewear shop in the city. The 36-year old said he has not reopened yet, unsure whether customers will come and fearful of infection. "It's very scary examining someone, up close, who might be infected," he said. "But I'm forced to eventually go back because of my financial situation."

Iran's death toll from the new coronavirus has risen by 87 to 5,118, health ministry spokesman Kianush Jahanpur said in a statement on state TV yesterday. The total number of infected cases in the Islamic Republic has reached 82,211, he said. Iran has extended furloughs for prisoners for another month, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said yesterday. — AFP

Wuhan lab chief denies virus link

BEIJING: The director of a maximum-security laboratory in China's coronavirus ground-zero city of Wuhan has rejected claims that it could be the source of the outbreak, calling it "impossible". Beijing has come under increasing pressure over transparency in its handling of the pandemic, with the US probing whether the virus actually originated in a virology institute with a high-security biosafety laboratory. Chinese scientists have said the virus likely jumped from an animal to humans in a market that sold wildlife.

But the existence of the facility has fuelled conspiracy theories that the germ spread from the Wuhan Institute of Virology, specifically its P4 laboratory which is equipped to handle dangerous viruses. In an interview with state media published Saturday Yuan Zhiming, director of the laboratory, said that "there's no way this virus came from us".

None of his staff had been infected, he told the English-language state broadcaster CGTN, adding the "whole institute is carrying out research in different areas related to the coronavirus". The institute had already dismissed the theory in February, saying it had

Amir urges Kuwaiti returnees to abide...

Continued from Page 1

The first phase, to last until Tuesday, will operate 75 flights, starting with several flights from Gulf countries. The first flight to return was a Kuwait Airways flight from Dubai. The second phase is scheduled to commence on April 25 and the entire program will be completed on May 7.

Islamist MP Adel Al-Damkhi yesterday submitted a proposal calling on landlords in general and the ministry of awqaf and Islamic affairs in particular to reduce rents amid an economic downturn triggered by the coronavirus. The lawmaker, who heads the National Assembly's human rights committee, said the coronavirus has severely impacted the economy all over the world, and as a result, the income of many people has been negatively affected, making it difficult for them to meet essential spending needs.

MoH taps tech to monitor returnees...

Continued from Page 1

Khabaz emphasized that the health ministry has trained around 100 doctors to use Shlonik to follow up on quarantined people. She stated that violators of the quarantine rules will be brought to account and could be jailed for three months or pay a fine of up to KD 5,000 (over \$15,000) or both. Khabaz also noted that the ministry will distribute barcoded bracelets to all returnees to make sure they do not leave their homes.

Ministry Spokesperson Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad identified the conditions set by the ministry to allow

Masks help Syrian family integrate...

Continued from Page 1

The town hall helped us. So we wanted to make a gesture for them in return." To date, the Shikho brothers - with the occasional help of their sisters and mother Radija - have produced about 2,000 masks, three-ply and washable. And their work has not gone unnoticed.

"Thanks to their masks, people can now venture out again," says local pharmacist Frederic Barthe. "The population has some sort of protection. It is a lesser evil, pending the arrival of the real FFP2 (masks) or surgical ones." His pharmacy and that of the neighboring town, together with a handful of local associations, try to reimburse the Shikhos one euro for each mask sold to cover costs and equipment. "People tell us we should sell them for four or five euros, but we don't want to do that, out of solidarity," explains Fawzi.

A 19-year-old high school student, Fawzi wrote a booklet, "I'm searching for peace", depicting the family's odyssey. It begins in Homs where they were living when the Syrian conflict began nearly a decade ago. From there, they moved to Lebanon for a few months, before reaching Afrine, a corner of

any returnee to opt for home quarantine and not state quarantine facilities. The returnee's health condition must be stable, and they should have a separate well-ventilated bedroom for quarantine, he said, adding that it is preferable that there is a separate toilet too. It is also necessary to identify specific individuals to serve the quarantined person at home, he stressed.

Sanad emphasized that the ministry of health is keen on implementing all preventive measures to maintain the safety of returnees and the whole society and to prevent the spread of the deadly virus. On Saturday, Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah affirmed that personnel of the department were prepared to receive Kuwaiti citizens repatriated from abroad. He urged adherence to health measures and guidelines to ensure the safe return of citizens from abroad, warning that authorities will not be lenient with anyone who breaches health precautions during the operation. — KUNA

Syria where they originally came from, but which is now occupied by anti-Kurdish Turkey. Their journey then took them to Istanbul, Athens and finally France. "We learned our first word of French at the airport, it was 'Bonjour'," laughs 17-year-old Hekmat who now speaks French almost like a native, albeit without the regional accent.

Like thousands of other refugees, the family sailed overnight to a Greek island on an overloaded inflatable boat from the Turkish coast. There were about 50 people on board, all related to the Shikhos, including 19 children. "Before the crossing, we said to ourselves 'either we die together or we arrive together'," whispers Fawzi. "Of course we were scared."

For Lavardec's mayor, Philippe Barrere, the decision to settle a family of Syrian refugees in the village was not entirely unproblematic. "There was some resistance within the population," he says. But "through school, local associations and work", the Shikhos "demonstrated their strong desire to integrate and this initiative with the masks is a very good example of their goodwill and their hearts being in the right place. Their past is no stranger to that," said the mayor. "They are used to fighting, to standing tall."

And it looks as if the inhabitants of Lavardec are beginning to accept them. "Sometimes we meet people wearing our masks," says one of the brothers. "The other day, a lady who was wearing one said 'thank you.'" — AFP

Stars

Daily SuDoku

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	6	8		5		4		
	9	4		6	1			
	4		1	2	6			
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	8							
		5	3				6	4

easy


Yesterday's Solution

5	2	7	3	1	4	8	9	6
3	6	8	5	9	7	1	2	4
1	4	9	6	2	8	7	3	5
9	7	6	8	3	2	5	4	1
4	5	3	1	7	6	2	8	9
2	8	1	9	4	5	6	7	3
6	1	2	4	8	9	3	5	7
7	3	4	2	5	1	9	6	8
8	9	5	7	6	3	4	1	2

very hard


STAR TRACK

Aries (March 21-April 19)




A friend or neighbor you need to contact could be in and out all day, Aries, and so you could have trouble reaching him or her. Phone or email probably won't work, since your friend could be too busy to check messages. The best way to make contact might be to hop in the car and drive to wherever they might be. Take the side streets, however. The main roads are probably clogged with traffic!

Libra (September 23-October 22)



Your natural psychic or intuitive abilities could be short-circuited today, Libra. Interference from the minds of other people could cloud issues, and this won't do you any good. Your imaginative faculties could be rather garbled as well. The best possible advice would be to take the day for your own needs. You can go back to your usual routine tomorrow.

Taurus (April 20-May 20)



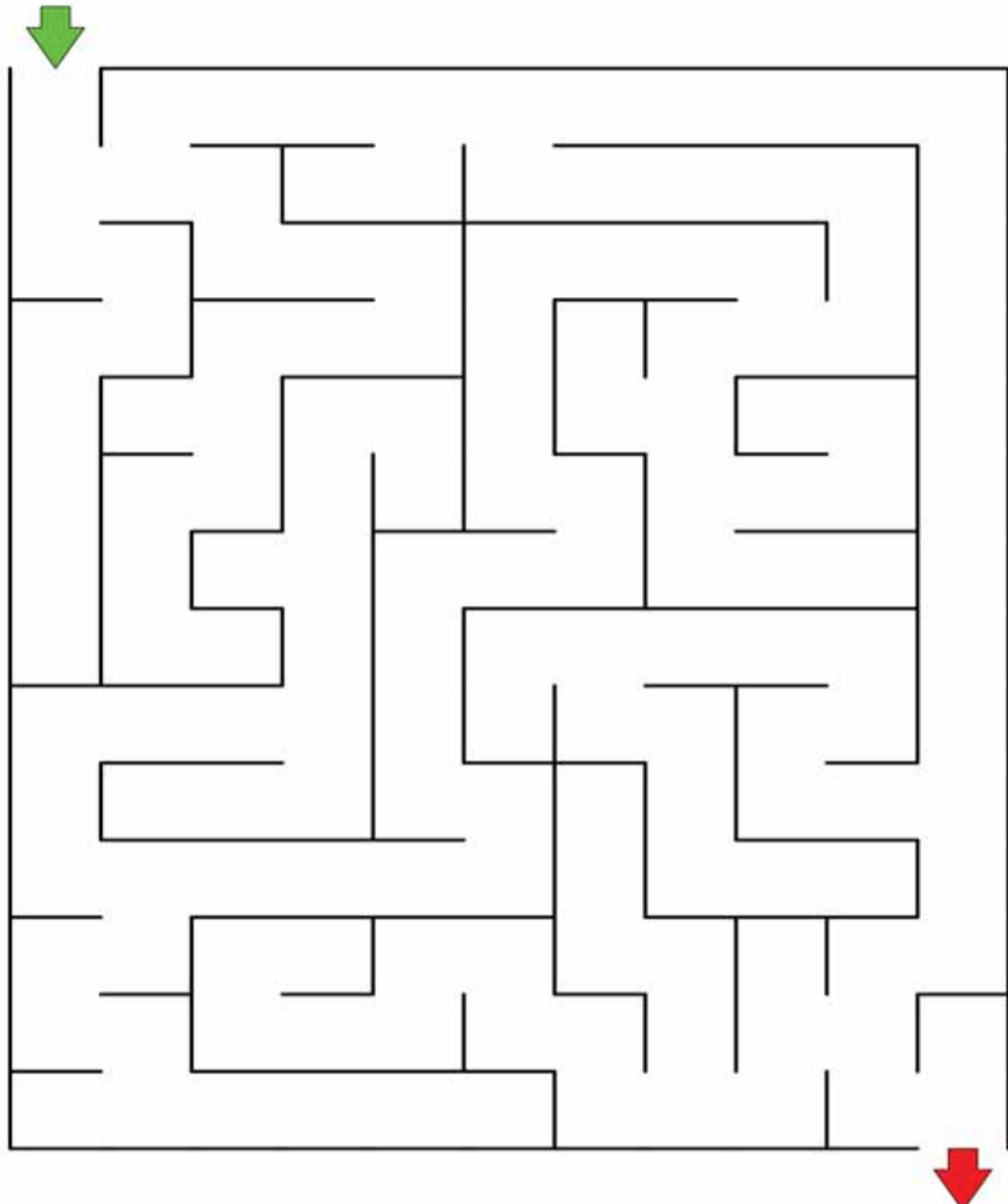
This probably isn't a good day to do work that concerns money, Taurus. Your mind may not be in the right space. You could make errors that cause problems. If possible, also avoid working on any kind of creative project, since your mind might not be very clear and you probably won't be happy with the results. However, this is a great day for routine work that doesn't require much concentration.

Scorpio (October 23-November 21)




The atmosphere around you could seem somewhat unreal today. If you get a weird vibe from someone, Scorpio, take everything this person says with a grain of salt. He or she has an agenda and isn't above distorting the truth to achieve it. If what they say doesn't affect you, don't worry about it. If it does, take pains to learn the facts before acting on it. You'll be glad you did.

Find the way



Gemini (May 21-June 20)




A lost object could have all the members of your household going through every room trying to find it, Gemini - probably without success. Visitors could pitch in as well and help with the search. The item is probably in a fairly large room that everybody uses, probably among other objects. If no one locates it, however, let it go for now. It could reappear later as if by magic.

Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)



Communication could take some extra effort today, Sagittarius. A business or romantic partner could seem like they're keeping things from you. You might get some uneasy vibes and wonder if there's trouble with your partnership. Don't be afraid to ask. Your friend probably won't tell you what the problem is, but will reassure you that it has nothing to do with you. If so, it isn't your business. Let it go.

Cancer (June 21-July 22)




This could be a very busy day in your community, Cancer. Some kind of rally, protest, or other public gathering might take place. If you attend, you may not hear much because of all the noise, and the event could seem disorganized at best. It could also render traffic impossible! If you can, stay home today. Going out could be more trouble than it's worth. Protest with your vote or your wallet instead.

Capricorn (December 22-January 19)




Messages from a distant state or foreign country, possibly through fax, email, or website, might not be totally accurate, Capricorn. If any information presented in this fashion sets off an alarm bell in your head, be sure to do some research on your own and check out the facts. Don't accept any news at face value today. The lines of human and technical communication are definitely out of whack today.

Leo (July 23-August 22)




A future course of action that you may or may not take could depend on information you might receive today, Leo. However, don't be surprised if the information is vague and needs to be clarified. On top of it all, you might not be able to reach the person who can clear it up for you! Hang in there. You'll want to make up your mind as soon as possible.

Aquarius (January 20- February 18)




Staying in touch with a love partner could be difficult today, Aquarius, almost to the point of causing a minor panic. Don't jump to any unwarranted conclusions about possible problems in the relationship. What's causing the silence is probably beyond your friend's control, and could well be related to sudden and unexpected crises, or possibly something as mundane as a computer breakdown. Be patient and hang in there.

Virgo (August 23-September 22)



Are you unhappy or uncertain about your current profession, Virgo? Are you thinking of making a change? News could reach you today of possible avenues to explore, but you shouldn't make any decision today. Your mind isn't as objective as it should be to think through everything. Think about it, by all means, but wait a day or two before giving serious consideration to anything vital.

Pisces (February 19-March 20)



Are you having problems with the lighting or heating in your home, Pisces? If so, you might not be able to get a professional out today. There could be problems in the entire neighborhood. You might have to get out the candles and flashlights to get you through the evening. Don't let this throw you. It's a minor inconvenience that will be fixed soon. Think of it as an adventure!

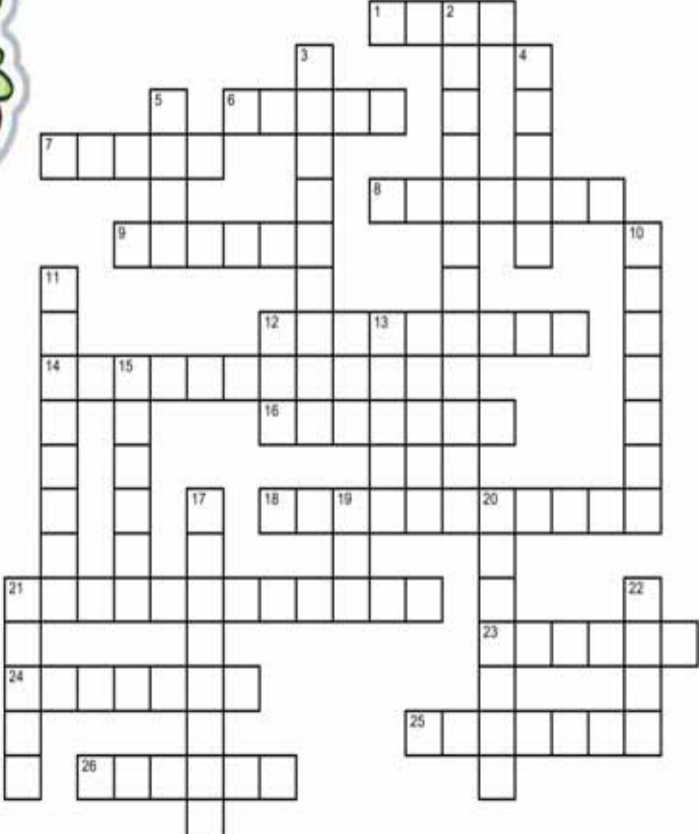
Join the dots



Crossword



Fast Food Crossword



- Across**
- Fizzy drink.
 - ___ rings.
 - Tube used to drink with.
 - Knot shaped bread.
 - Cakes with a hole.
 - Beef patty on a bun.
 - Small towel for your face and fingers.
 - Condiment made with tomatoes.
 - Fried potato strips.
 - Beef patty on a bun with cheese.
 - Sausage in a roll.
 - Yellow condiment.
 - Flour tortilla folder around a filling.
 - Red slice on a burger.

- Two pieces of bread and filling.
- Sizzling strips.
- Preserved cucumber.
- Frozen milk dessert.
- Breakfast muffin topping.
- Carryout order.
- Package deal.
- Take away order.

- Down**
- Order from your car.
 - Cold, frothy, dairy drink.
 - Italian pie with toppings.
 - Food in an edible shell.
 - Small chicken pieces.

Word Bank

Bacon	Hamburger	Pickle
Burrito	Hot dog	Pizza
Cheeseburger	Ice Cream	Pretzel
Combo	Ketchup	Sandwich
Donuts	Milkshake	Soda
Drive-through	Mustard	Straw
Egg	Napkin	Taco
For here	Nuggets	To go
French Fries	Onion	Tomato

Sports

Photo of the Day



CAPE TOWN: Richard Murray is seen during training for a triathlon in Cape Town, South Africa. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

Italian tennis hit the roof during virus

ROME: Tennis players, like athletes everywhere, are finding inventive ways to train with courts closed and contact banned, but two youngsters in Italy have taken it to a higher level: the roof.

When the tennis club in Finale Ligure, a small town in northern Italy, closed at the beginning of March, as part of Italy's fight against the coronavirus pandemic, its coaches challenged their young players to find inventive ways to keep training and to film themselves doing it. The result is a series of videos posted on the Tennisclub Finale Facebook page. They showed youngsters practising their strokes with or without rackets or, in one case, with a long handled broom.

Several show players hitting balls against walls in the street or in parking lots or even in their bedroom or the family living room, with the wide-screen television positioned ominously close to the apex of the forehand swing. The videos resembled many others being posted on social media under the #tennisathome hashtag, but one stood out, catching the attention of the ATP and tennis players and fans around the world.

Vittoria, 14, and Carola, 11, climbed onto the rooftop terraces of their buildings, which face each other across the street. There they lofted shots over the guard rails and the road, running round not only their backhands but also boiler vents as the ball bounced, not on the clay they are used to but on concrete slabs.

"It was their idea. They know each other well, they're friends and they live in neighbouring buildings," their coach Dionisio Poggi, told AFP. "They are not the same age, so they don't train in the same group and don't play in the same category. But they are both strong and play competitively," the coach said. "Carola, who is 11, is in the top two or three in the region in her age group." Tracy Austin, a former world number one who built her game on hitting long, retweeted the video. "This is next level #TennisAtHome! I don't think this can be topped. Keep the ball deep." — AFP

Beaumont says virus could spark rugby calendar reform

World Rugby launch \$100 million virus relief package

LONDON: World Rugby chairman Bill Beaumont believes the "spirit of collaboration" the sport has witnessed in response to the coronavirus pandemic will lead to a new international calendar.

Former England captain Beaumont was behind plans for a new two-tier Nations Championship — encompassing Europe's Six Nations and the southern hemisphere Rugby Championship — that collapsed last year amid reports the likes of Scotland were concerned by the risk of relegation from what is currently a 'closed' event.

But Beaumont, who must see off a challenge from vice-chairman Agustin Pichot if he is to be re-elected, believes the ongoing global shutdown of the sport caused by the virus has caused many within the game to rethink their views.

This week saw World Rugby launch a \$100 million dollar virus relief package and Beaumont, 68, has been heartened by the co-operation shown by countries as they plan for a time when rugby can resume.

"I'm pretty confident that there will be a variation of the Nations Cup," Beaumont

told BBC Radio on Saturday. "I think there's a real spirit of collaboration between the north and the south, looking at what we can do with our playing windows and international windows that can generate more funds in another competition.

"You have to look at the calendar — the British and Irish Lions tour every four

think in the past people have been quite protective about what they have got, what we are looking at now this is probably a reality check in the sport — are we doing things correctly?

"You are pretty foolish if you don't learn lessons," insisted Beaumont, who had previously warned there might be no more international rugby played this year. That would be a huge blow to the sport given finances from internationals help subsidise all levels of the game.

The All Blacks accepted a 50 per cent pay freeze on Thursday as New Zealand's players' association said it was preparing for the nightmare scenario of no more professional rugby this year.

Rugby Australia alone is forecast losing losses of AU\$120 million (\$76 million) if their entire season is wiped out. Former Pumas scrum-half Pichot launched his bid to become chairman last week, with the 45-year-old saying the virus outbreak provided an opportunity for the "global realignment" of the game that should see its commercial income "moving on from the time where those

“

Spirit of collaboration

”

years, the Rugby World Cup every four years," added Beaumont, himself a former Lions skipper.

'REALITY CHECK'

"It's a balancing act that you have to do to fit everything into this jigsaw." But I



World Rugby chairman Bill Beaumont

benefits were for just a few".

He promptly received backing from former England coach Clive Woodward, who played in Test sides captained by Beaumont. Woodward said the equality and diversity needed in the global game

was hampered by an imbalance of power on World Rugby's council that sees the established Six Nations and Rugby Championship countries have three votes each, while the likes of 'Tier Two' Fiji and Samoa have just one vote each. — AFP

Monte Carlo win sparked Nadal breakthrough

PARIS: Rafael Nadal celebrates the 15th anniversary of his first Monte Carlo Masters title yesterday, a victory which sparked a breakthrough season, a maiden Grand Slam triumph at Roland Garros and set the Spaniard on the road to becoming one of the sport's greatest players.

Nadal was just 18 when he beat Guillermo Coria in the 2005 Monte Carlo final. Two years earlier, he had offered tennis a glimpse of the future when, at 16, he stunned French Open champion Albert Costa on the famous red clay on the shores of the Mediterranean.

His 2005 triumph was one of 11 titles Nadal captured that year — eight of them on clay at Costa do Saupe, Acapulco, Monte Carlo, Barcelona, Rome, the French Open, Bastad and Stuttgart. He also proved he was no slow-court bully, ending the year with hard court victories in Canada, Beijing and Madrid.

That success was also reflected in the rankings. At the end of 2004, he was at 51; fast forward 12 months and he was the world number two. Among his 85-trophy career haul, 11 have come in Monte Carlo including a record eight in a row from 2005-2012 and three more between 2016-2018. In 76

matches at the event, he has lost just five times. Despite his maiden victory in Monte Carlo, however, Nadal wasn't sounding confident about his chances at Roland Garros later that season.

"No, no, no. I am not favourite, no. It's my first Roland Garros," the teenager told reporters in faltering English, a language he was gradually mastering thanks to lessons of "20 minutes, 30 minutes" every day.

"I am playing good now, but I don't know at the French Open if I'm going to play good or I'm going to play bad." He needn't have worried.

Just weeks later in Paris, Nadal beat Roger Federer in the semi-finals and the now forgotten Mariano Puerta in the final, coming from a set down.

Eleven more Roland Garros crowns have followed for a Grand Slam haul of 19, just one behind Federer's record 20. Had it not been for a career-long struggle with wrist and knee problems — which kept him out of nine majors — that figure would likely have been even more impressive.

The ongoing coronavirus crisis has robbed Nadal of the opportunity to clinch a 12th Monte Carlo title. However, the pause has given rivals time to reflect on Nadal's 15 years at the top, with 209 weeks in the world number one spot. He has not dropped out of the top 10 since Monte Carlo in 2005. "It's obvious he has a champion's mentality, what he's managed to produce over the years on all surfaces, the way he was bouncing back from numerous injuries," said world number one Novak Djokovic. — AFP

Sprinter Cuthbert, Australia's 'Golden Girl'

SYDNEY: There have been many 'Golden Girls' over the history of the Olympics but for Australia, sprinter Betty Cuthbert remains the original and the best. In nine days in late 1956, teenager Cuthbert came from almost nowhere to win three sprint gold medals and become the face of what were remembered as the "Friendly Games", the first to be held in the southern hemisphere.

There were nerves, both from the International Olympic Committee and locally, over whether Melbourne could handle the hosting of the Games but Cuthbert's success helped put those concerns to rest. Raised a mile from what would later become the site of the 2000 Sydney Games, Cuthbert was so unlikely a champion that she had bought tickets to the Melbourne Olympics on the presumption that she might not even make a strong Australia track team.

"It was as if her entire sprinting career was geared not to a series of peaks but to one explosive climax that lasted through the Melbourne Olympics," Harry Gordon wrote in his definitive history of Australia at the Olympics. "Its timing was exquisite."

Cuthbert had only pushed herself firmly into contention for a spot at the Games by running a world record time in the 200 metres in Sydney a couple of months before the opening ceremony. Highly distinctive with her blonde hair, high knee lift and gaping mouth sucking in air, Cuthbert made a flying start to win Australia's first gold medal of the Games in the 100m final.

There was more delight for the crowd at the Melbourne Cricket Ground later in the week when she won the 200m, leaving German Christa Stubnick and fellow Australian Marlene Mathews to take silver and bronze as they had in the 100.

The 4x100m relay was a tighter affair but Cuthbert ran a magnificent final leg to cross the line in a world record time of 44.5 seconds and claim her third gold, unprecedented for an Australian at a single Olympics.

Cuthbert's place in the pantheon of Australian sporting greats was assured before she celebrated her 19th birthday and although she continued to set world records, she had to wait eight years for another taste of Olympic gold.



Betty Cuthbert

Injury had hindered her attempt to defend her titles in Rome in 1960 but, after a short-lived retirement, Cuthbert reinvented herself as a 400m runner and won the inaugural women's gold medal in the event in Tokyo in 1964.

Five years further on and Cuthbert discovered she had multiple sclerosis, an illness which she fought courageously until her death at the age of 79 in 2017. In 2000, she carried the Olympic torch in her wheelchair at the opening ceremony of the Sydney Games, where Cathy Freeman would famously regain the 400m title for Australia. "Betty is an inspiration, and her story will continue to inspire Australian athletes for generations to come," Freeman said upon Cuthbert's death. — Reuters

Sports

‘We have no coronavirus’: Turkmenistan football season restarts with crowds

Supporters only too happy to follow action from the stands

ASHGABAT: Turkmenistan is rebooting its football season this week, with fans flocking back to stadiums in one of the few countries yet to declare a case of coronavirus.

The reclusive Central Asian state followed other countries around the world when it suspended its eight-team league in March just three games into the season. The national football federation cited recommendations by the health ministry and the World Health Organisation for preventing the spread of the illness. A month later, and despite international concerns that Turkmen authorities are underplaying the threat of the virus, football is returning, with supporters only too happy to follow the action from the stands. “Joy boosts our immunity,” joked Ashir Yusupov, a 34-year-old entrepreneur.

He said he would be watching reigning champions Altyn Asyr take on early table-top-pers Kopetdag in the capital Ashgabat on Sunday.

Yusupov said he had no fear of crowded places, despite being aware of bans on sports events in other countries. “We have no coronavirus, so why not restart our league?” he asked.

Three ex-Soviet states have bucked the global trend for suspending professional leagues: Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Belarus.

Global interest in the Belarusian league has surged on the back of its decision, while the Tajikistan’s Super Cup final earlier this month attracted a curious multi-lingual online following.

But Belarus, which has confirmed 4,779 coron-

avirus cases, has been strongly criticised for allowing fans to attend games.

Tajikistan has begun its season with matches held behind closed doors, even as its authoritarian government, like that of Turkmenistan, continues to insist there are no cases in the country.

Ashgabat-based Altyn Asyr, whose name translates as “Golden Age”, won the Turkmen title last year. Victory against Kopetdag would take it top of the table, with other teams set to play on Monday.

Vepa, a 20-year-old student, said he “never misses a game” and will go to the match on Sunday despite not supporting either team.

His club is Ahal, who represent the region outside Ashgabat from where the family of President Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov and much of the political elite hail.

Vepa said he was not sure Ahal can mount a serious title

challenge but he has high hopes for new signing Elman Tagayev, a 30-year-old midfielder who has returned from a stint with a club in neighbouring Uzbekistan. “His game is dynamic and beautiful,” said Vepa, who did not give his second name.

Even during Soviet times Turkmenistan was no footballing powerhouse, and the sport is not among those promoted by sports-mad Berdimukhamedov.

On World Health Day on April 7, the president was shown on state television riding a horse and a bicycle as state employees engaged in mass exercise sessions across the country. Such large public events have prompted observers to question how seriously the



A soccer match being played between two clubs.

government is taking the pandemic.

Since then, Berdimukhamedov has ordered officials to ramp up efforts to detect any cases and prevent the virus spreading.

The president is known as the nation’s Arkadag, or “Protector.” State media has stressed the importance

of his leadership in the pandemic.

In a poem published in state newspapers on Friday, the president’s favourite poet Gozel Shagulyeva praised him as “the impregnable fortress of the motherland.” “Protector, you are watching over (our) health,” Shagulyeva wrote. — AFP

No relegation if no more Premier League play

LONDON: There is unlikely to be any relegation from the English Premier League if the season ends with no more play possible because of the coronavirus outbreak, Brighton and Hove Albion owner Tony Bloom has told British media.

Premier League clubs met on Friday to discuss possible models for finishing the season but all op-

tions remained hypothetical after the U.K. government extended lockdown restrictions for another three weeks. Brighton were two points clear of the relegation zone with nine matches remaining when the league was brought to a halt on March 13.

If the season ended with no more play possible, Liverpool would claim the title and Norwich City, Aston Villa and Bournemouth would be for the drop. Relegation means a financial hit somewhere in the region of \$100 million and Bloom thought it unlikely that the required 70% of clubs would vote to send the three teams down.

“It would be very difficult to relegate somebody, particularly from the Premier League, if the season hasn’t played out,” Bloom said.

“You may get a title winner, obviously Liverpool

deserve it, you may use that criteria for European qualification, but I do not see how anyone can vote for that, certainly the percent needed for teams to get relegated.”

With some teams having more matches remaining than others, another proposal is that a club’s final position be decided by the average number of points they have won per game.

Bloom thought that option even less likely to succeed. “I don’t foresee a situation, if the season’s not played out, that teams will get relegated on a points-per-game basis,” he said. “I just don’t think it’s fathomable that a team which is not allowed to play out the season may lose out on 0.2 points based on this system, and also it does not take into account the strength of the team you have not played.” — Reuters

ICC warn players to beware fixers

LONDON: Elite level cricket may have been suspended because of the coronavirus but the sport’s anti-corruption chief has told players to remain aware of approaches by potential fixers.

There has been no major cricket played since last month and there’s no certainty as to when any first-class, franchise or international matches will resume.

But Alex Marshall, the head of the International Cricket Council’s anti-corruption unit, said it was wrong to assume this would lead to a decline in approaches from criminals who have long targeted cricket because the nature of the game means betting coups can be engineered by ‘fixing’ in-play events and not just the result.

“COVID-19 may have put a temporary stop on the playing of international and domestic cricket around the world but the corrupters are still active,” Marshall told the Guardian. “As a result, our work with members, players, player associations and agents continues.” A former police chief in England, Marshall added his team were aware reductions in income caused by the current suspension of cricket could make lower-paid players more vulnerable to fixing approaches.

“We are seeing known corrupters use this time, when players are on social media more than ever, to connect with them and try to build a relationship that



A soccer match being played between two clubs.

they can exploit at a later date,” he said.

“We have reached out to our members, players and their wider networks to highlight this issue and

ensure they all continue to be aware of the dangers of approaches and do not let their guard down while there is no cricket being played.” — AFP

African club finals postponed

CAIRO: The African Champions League and African Confederation Cup finals, due to take place in May, were postponed on Saturday because of the spread of the coronavirus, officials announced. “The finals of the Confederation Cup and Champions League 2019/20 have been put on hold until further notice,” said a statement from the Confederation of African Football (CAF). The Cameroonian port city of Douala had been chosen to stage the Champions League final on Friday, May 29, at the recently built 50,000-seat Japoma Stadium.

The Confederation Cup final was to have been played at the Prince Moulay Abdellah Stadium in Moroccan capital Rabat on Sunday, May 24. “The new schedule will be communicated in due time after consultation with the various stakeholders,” added the statement by CAF, which had already postponed the semi-finals.

“CAF is monitoring the situation closely and working with the relevant authorities including the World Health Organization (WHO) on the impact of the virus on the continent, and will announce developments to our competitions at the appropriate time.”

Home-and-away finals were ditched by CAF last year after the second leg of the Champions League final in Tunis was abandoned. Cairo teams Al Ahly and Zamalek and Casablanca sides Raja and Wydad had reached this season’s two-leg Champions League semi-finals, scheduled for May 1/2 and 8/9.

Moroccan sides Hassania Agadir and Renaissance Berkane, Guinean club Horoya and Egyptian outfit Pyramids were through to the Confederation Cup semi-finals on May 3 and 10. Single-match finals are a gamble in Africa as football supporters generally shun matches not involving clubs from their country.



CAIRO: Zamalek clash with Pyramids in Egyptian Premier League.

Limited flights and the fact that most African football followers cannot afford the relatively high cost of travel within the continent are other negative factors. The CAF Super Cup, an annual match between the Champions League and Confederation Cup winners, was

launched in 1993 and small crowds attended matches in neutral countries. Embarrassed by tiny turnouts, CAF gave home advantage to the Champions League winners from 1996. — AFP

Rashid reveals 2023 World Cup ambition

LONDON: Adil Rashid has said it would be “lovely” to play in the 2023 World Cup even though the leg-spinner will have turned 35 by the time England defend their title. Persistent shoulder trouble has been a problem for Rashid, who needed pain-killing injections while helping England win their first men’s World Cup title on home soil last year.

Nevertheless, Rashid told reporters in a conference call on Saturday: “My aim is to play for England as long as possible. “We don’t know how long that could be. Months, years, or whatever it is “I have a vision in terms of maybe achieving that, the 2023 World Cup would be lovely.”

“If I stay fit, if my shoulder gets stronger then I can hopefully play for a long time.” The Yorkshireman was an ever-present during last year’s World Cup, although his 11 tournament wickets came at an expensive average of 47.81 apiece. But even though he wasn’t fully fit, “top-drawer” England captain Eoin Morgan never lost faith in his leg-spinner. “He knew the shoulder wasn’t great, but he kept backing me,” said Rashid.

“I went in there with a strong mindset and did a decent job. That shows when I am 100 percent everything else will hopefully work out better.” Rashid has, however, repeatedly taken important wickets, a quality he demonstrated again as he won the man-of-the-match award for a return of three for 52 against South Africa in Johannesburg in February that included Temba Bavuma and Quinton de Kock.

‘TURNING POINT’

And with the next World Cup set to be played in India, where pitches traditionally favour spinners, Rashid could be an even greater threat. “South Africa was a big turning point for me,” he said. “In South Africa the shoulder was stronger.”

Looking ahead, Rashid said the fact all senior cricket worldwide was currently suspended because of the coronavirus outbreak had not led him to change his mind about remaining a white-ball specialist should the 2020 English season get underway.

But Rashid, a veteran of 19 Tests, said he would “reassess” in September, leaving open the possibility of a bid for a place in England’s squad for the 2021/22 Ashes in Australia.

“If I don’t make that decision of playing red-ball and just sticking to white-ball then there’s no Ashes or whatever for me. “But if I do, and I’m fully fit then that’s something that I could look towards but that’s something that I’ve got to earn.”

Meanwhile Rashid, one of the most high-profile Muslim sportsmen in Britain, said it was vital government guidance on social distancing designed to stop the spread of the coronavirus was “abided by regardless” of the fact Ramadan, traditionally a time for communal gathering, starts next week.

“Meeting up with family and friends is not the question with what is going on in the world right now,” he said. “The main thing is for us to stay at home, stay safe and look after each other.” — AFP

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18 Sprinter Betty Cuthbert, Australia's 'Golden Girl'



19 'We have no coronavirus': Turkmenistan football season restarts with crowds



Tennis 'big three' to help lower-ranked players



(From left) Roger Federer, Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal.

PARIS: Novak Djokovic said on Saturday that he, Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal are organising aid for players struggling with the paralysis of the game due to the coronavirus pandemic. "I spoke to Roger and Rafa a few days ago," Djokovic, the world number one, said in an Instagram chat with friend and rival Stan Wawrinka on Saturday.

"We had a long conversation about the near future of tennis, what is going to happen, how we can contribute and how we can help especially lower-ranked players, who are obviously struggling the most."

"The majority of the players who are ranked between 200, 250 in the world, and the 700th or 1,000th do not have federation support, do not have sponsors. They are completely independent and left alone," he said.

"Guys who are ranked between 200-250, espe-

cially to 700...are thinking of leaving tennis right now." He said players, the ATP and the four Grand Slams "would all get together and will contribute to a player relief fund that ATP will distribute."

"It looks, hopefully, that there will something between \$3 million (2.75 million euros) and \$4.5 million that is going to be distributed," he estimated.

Djokovic said the cash could come from the prize money for the season-ending World Tour Finals or the final bonus pools for top players.

"Maybe if we don't have any tournaments this season, we can take a certain percentage from our prize money form Australian Open in January," he said.

"These guys are the grass roots of tennis. The future of tennis. We need to show them they still can rely on support of the top guys."

According to reports in tennis media, Djokovic, as president of the ATP Players' Council, which also includes Federer and Nadal, proposed to members that players in the top 100 for singles and the top 20 in doubles contribute according to their rankings.

The proposed scale runs from \$30,000 for a top-five player to \$5,000 for those

between 51 and 100. That would raise approximately \$1 million and the ATP would make a similar contribution.

On Friday, ATP chief Andrea Gaudenzi echoed the call for unity on the tour website. "Our guys are at home, obviously unable to play, unable to earn money and financially struggling, so we will try to help," he said, adding that the ATP faced the problem of not knowing how long the crisis would last and how much revenue it would lose.

"I've been quite touched by the top players who reached out, the big names expressing their desire of helping the lower-ranked players and putting those players first." "We are also talking with the Grand Slams about it. They may want to join in the effort. I think it would be a great message for the sport."

World tennis has been at a standstill since the beginning of March and will not resume until mid-July at the earliest following the postponement of Roland Garros and the cancellation of Wimbledon. —AFP

“Our guys are at home”

Wuhan football team make emotional return

SHANGHAI: Wuhan Zall, the Chinese Super League team from the epicentre of the coronavirus pandemic, made an emotional return to the city after more than three months torn from their families.

Zall endured a turbulent 104 days on the road, including being stranded in Spain, because Wuhan was sealed off in January when the virus killed and infected thousands there.

The city is now emerging from its weeks-long lockdown and hundreds of chanting fans met the Zall players when they arrived at Wuhan's train station late Saturday, state media said.

Wearing masks, the players had bouquets of flowers thrust into their hands while supporters clad in the team's orange colours held banners and sang.

"After more than three months of wandering, the homesick Wuhan Zall team members finally set foot in their hometown," the team said on the Twitter-like Weibo.

The squad, led by their Spanish coach Jose Gonzalez, will now spend a few days at home before resuming training on Wednesday.

"The local players will be reunited with their families, having not seen them for more than three

months," said Zall, who finished sixth last year in the top-flight CSL. "The club is very grateful for the support and understanding of the players' families."

The squad's return home is the final chapter in a long saga.

They began training for the new Chinese Super League season, since postponed indefinitely, in early January in the southern city of Guangzhou.

They flew to Malaga, Spain towards the end of January, by which time the city of Wuhan and its 11 million people were under harsh restrictions because of the coronavirus outbreak.

"They are not walking viruses, they are athletes," Gonzalez told Spanish media at the time, pleading for his players not to be demonised.

But when the virus began taking hold in Spain in March, Zall made arrangements to fly back to China, where the number of infections was slowing markedly.

Wuhan was still sealed off so the squad, via a prolonged transit in Germany, flew to China's southern city of Shenzhen on March 16.

They went into three weeks of quarantine, followed by training in the nearby city of Foshan, before taking a high-speed train from Guangzhou to Wuhan on Saturday evening.

Zall are preparing for a season that still has no start date. The CSL was supposed to begin on February 22 but could now kick off in late June, according to latest reports. China's government says it has curbed coronavirus at home but on Friday admitted errors in tallying the death toll in Wuhan and raised the grim count there by 50 percent to 3,869. —AFP



Wuhan Zall team members seen exercising in Spain.