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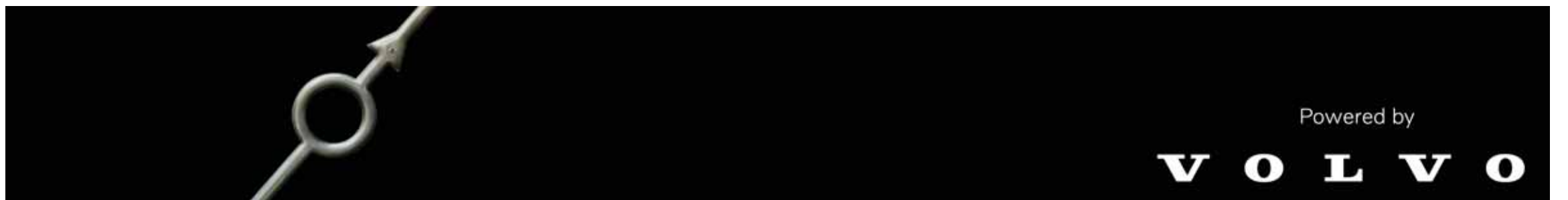
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Amir praises joint efforts to fight coronavirus outbreak

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KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah heads the Cabinet's extraordinary session at Dar Salwa on Monday. — KUNA

KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah headed on Monday the Cabinet's extraordinary session at Dar Salwa. "I can only at the beginning of this meeting express my sincere thanks and appreciations to my brother the Prime Minister, and all ministers, for their kind suggestion, out of concerns, that I should leave the country due to the coronavirus outbreak," HH the Amir said.

"I appreciate all this, and this makes me feel only more loyal to you all, as your elder brother, but thank Allah Almighty we now are all together; I can only thank my brother, the Prime Minister, the ministers for their efforts," he said.

"They said Kuwait is the first country that preceded others in the face of this dangerous disease, the novel coronavirus," HH the Amir noted, adding "the second thing I would like to say is a big thank you to my brother Marzouq Al-Ghanem, the Speaker of the National Assembly and the Prime Minister, for their cooperation and building a bridge between the two branches so that all members of parliament become aware of all measures and facts, and the reality on the ground during this crisis."

HH the Amir added thank Allah Almighty this



KUWAIT: Nine expats were arrested for breaching the curfew in Farwaniya. — KUNA

idea succeeded, due to their cooperation and mutual support between the two branches, "which reached the result that you are seeing now". "I hope that this will continue until the end of this crisis. I am also pleased to thank each one of you ministers - females and males - sitting with their colleagues, for a great job and effort during this time," the Amir added.

Continued on Page 16

Assembly hails Amir's efforts, cooperation

KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem expressed thanks yesterday to HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for his directives and successful management of the coronavirus outbreak crisis. During a National Assembly session held yesterday, Ghanem voiced great appreciation of the tremendous efforts exerted by HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and his team to fight the coronavirus challenge.

Ghanem also praised the Kuwaiti people's unity and their support for their political leadership and government to implement all preventive and precautionary measures to contain the virus. He also sincerely thanked the MPs for their cooperation, support and sublimation, above any differences, to stand as one team with the government and the Kuwaiti people.

HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled stressed the importance on learning from the lessons and painful scenes that we all are witnessing in many countries as a result of the spread of coronavirus, stressing on the need for everyone to continue to cooperate with the government to protect public health in Kuwait.

"We are closing on the first month since the start of the crisis and we are

now in the second month, and we all know that we are facing a crisis that does not have a specific time limit, and we must continue with our preventive measures to protect public health in Kuwait from this dangerous pandemic," the PM said in a speech during a parliament session. "We should learn from other experiences, and to spare our country from sliding into chaos," Sheikh Sabah said, calling for a continuing cooperation with all parties involved in combating COVID-19.

The premier thanked the Kuwaiti people and residents in the country for their cooperation and commitment to health instructions, especially staying indoors and avoiding gatherings. The premier also praised the support received by the National Assembly during combating this pandemic. — KUNA



KUWAIT: MPs are seen during a session of the National Assembly yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Gulf residents call for end to VoIP call bans

DUBAI: Residents in the United Arab Emirates and other Gulf states are urging telecom firms to further ease restrictions on free Internet calls as coronavirus separates families and forces people to work and study from home. The UAE's two telecommunications firms Etisalat and Du said they recently enabled Microsoft Teams over both Wi-Fi and mobile data connections as well as Blackboard, Zoom and CloudTalk - but appear to continue to block more popular applications.

"Please just listen to us. Unblock Skype, WhatsApp, FaceTime, even if it's just temporary. 80% of the country is away from their homes," urged Twitter user @danielmarcevans. "If not now during the spread of the virus to allow us to communicate with our families, then when?" user Basem Saif tweeted on Sunday.

Applications that use Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) services - free Internet-to-Internet voice and video calls - are restricted to varying degrees in the UAE, Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, but not in Bahrain or Kuwait. Expatriates make up the majority in many Gulf states, particularly the UAE, the region's business and tourism hub.

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Arab kids told 'turn on TV' for home lessons

TRIPOLI: Either on television as in Libya or on tablets in the IT-savvy Gulf, in the time of novel coronavirus millions of schoolchildren around the Arab world are now learning lessons at home. Governments across the region have shuttered schools forcing pupils to stay away in a bid to combat the virus, but at the risk of deepening an already worrying educational divide. Across the region in many countries

afflicted by poverty and patchy internet access, teachers, parents and pupils have been left scrambling not to lose the rest of the school year.

Conflict-plagued countries such as Syria and Yemen face an even greater challenge, with infrastructure and modern telecommunications in tatters. Over three million children in the Arab world were already deprived of schooling even before the coronavirus crisis, with more than 8,850 schools either damaged or destroyed in fighting in Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen.

In Libya, despite its protracted war, the education ministry has struck a deal with local television stations to broadcast "compulsory" lessons for

Continued on Page 16

Indian police clear anti-govt protest sit-in

NEW DELHI: Police in India's capital broke up the longest-running protest against Prime Minister Narendra Modi's citizenship law yesterday, citing a ban on public gatherings because of the coronavirus outbreak. Dozens of people, many of them women, have been staging a sit-in protest since early December on a street in the Shaheen Bagh neighbor-

hood, which has become a focal point for opposition to the law seen as discriminating against Muslims.

Hundreds of police in riot gear surrounded the protesters early yesterday and told them to leave, said Delhi's joint police commissioner D C Srivastava. "It is a dangerous environment, with this coronavirus, we urged them to leave," he told reporters. Some demonstrators resisted the police and at least nine people had been detained, six of them women, Srivastava said, adding there was no violence. Television showed police taking down tents and billboards at the protest site with bulldozers.

Continued on Page 16



KUWAIT: Children learn online via a computer screen at their home on Monday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat



NEW DELHI: Security personnel patrol on the streets in Shaheen Bagh after removing demonstrators yesterday. — AFP

Local

US envoy thanks Kuwait's public servants, health workers, for tireless efforts

Ambassador Alina Romanowski's interview on COVID crisis, guidance for Americans

KUWAIT: The United States' Ambassador to Kuwait Alina Romanowski spoke in an interview about a variety of topics related to the fight against the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19) in Kuwait and globally. The following are excerpts from the interview:

Question: How do you spend your days during the Coronavirus crisis?

Ambassador Alina Romanowski: My highest priority during the COVID-19 crisis is the welfare and security of American citizens in Kuwait, including the US Embassy staff and their families. I work every day to ensure that we are helping those in urgent need. I spend my days maintaining close contact with the Kuwaiti government and my colleagues in the region and back in Washington on the latest developments

regarding COVID-19. I commend the Kuwaiti government for its proactive response to COVID-19. The United States is committed to working with Kuwait and other members of the international community to



Emergency contacts for US citizens

stop the spread of this disease.

The US Embassy staff have largely shifted to working from home to follow social distancing practices and reduce the direct contact among employees. We are continuously updating information for the public on our website as well as providing emergency services to American citizens, and are available to those who need assistance. American citizens in need of emergency assistance or services should contact us at 2259-1001. Otherwise, you may e-mail us at KuwaitACS@state.gov.

While COVID-19 developments dominate the headlines and much of our lives, the US Embassy is still conducting the foreign policy of America in Kuwait. We have not lost sight of the need for maintaining and strengthening our cooperation with Kuwait on a range of political, economic, and security issues, and we are now more closely working together on health issues.

It is important to follow instructions from official authorities and also important to keep our spirits up during these challenging times. We should ensure that we maintain both our physical wellbeing as well as our emotional wellbeing. For some, that may mean engaging in activities with family at home, or trying new hobbies, keeping in mind social distancing advice. During my free time, I have been reading, exercising at home, watching movies, and catching up with my friends on social media.

These are trying times for everyone. I want to

express my appreciation for the tireless efforts of Kuwait's public servants, particularly its health care workers, to support the health and wellbeing of everyone living in Kuwait.

Question: How is the Embassy engaging with its citizens in the country on COVID-19?

Romanowski: We remain committed to doing everything we can to protect the health and welfare of American citizens overseas, and the Department of State is actively working with governments and international partners around the world, including Kuwait, to combat the spread of COVID-19.

We are continuously assessing travel conditions in areas affected by COVID-19, including Kuwait, and we update travel advisories and safety information for US citizens as situations evolve on the US Embassy website.

I recommend that US citizens enroll in the State Department's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) so that they can receive important messages about Kuwait, including timely alerts and updates to travel advisories. I also encourage American citizens to continually check the US Embassy's webpage devoted exclusively to COVID-19: <https://kw.usembassy.gov/covid-19-information>. We update this page daily, including on weekends.

This website also contains links to official information from Kuwaiti authorities, including contact details for the local authorities that can provide assistance and information in English. The US Embassy stands ready to help, and we can be contacted at 2259-1001 (for emergency assistance or services) or KuwaitACS@state.gov for non-emergency inquiries.

Question: How do you evaluate Kuwait's procedures and measures to combat the virus?

Romanowski: COVID-19 is a health concern that is being taken very seriously by both the United States and Kuwaiti governments. The Kuwaiti government has taken an active approach to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in a manner consistent with guidance from the World Health Organization. I commend the Kuwaiti government for its efforts and for the hard work and dedication of its public servants and health practitioners.

At the US Embassy, we strongly believe that we must do our part to slow the spread of COVID-19. This includes teleworking, not gathering in large groups, practicing social distancing, and protecting our health through constant hand washing and other good hygiene practices. We are all members of a global team, and together we must employ the most effective strategies to combat this disease.

The United States government also believes in doing its part globally. On March 2, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) announced \$37 million in financing for countries affected by, or at high risk to the spread of, COVID-19. That is in addition to the \$100 million and more than 17 tons of humanitarian assistance that the United States sent to the Chinese people in January.

This interview was previously published in Arabic in Al-Anbaa newspaper. Reprinted with permission of the US Embassy in Kuwait and Al-Anbaa newspaper.

People in Kuwait volunteer in time of distress

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: People in Kuwait like to perform charity and help others especially during crises. In the current pandemic, thousands of people have volunteered to help the community in different ways. Some volunteered with the Civil Defense, others with the Kuwait Red Crescent Society, and so on. They were distributed in different locations around Kuwait.

Many organizations and businesses took the initiative to provide different services including putting their hospitals, aircrafts and other facilities at the disposal of the government to use in case of need. Also telecom companies provided free calls and 5 gigabytes of internet for all users during this crisis. A few landlords have reduced rents or excused tenants to pay rent this month.

At the same time, some people are trying to do good deeds that can have adverse results. In one recent example, a group of volunteers wanted to distribute meals for the working laborers in one of the areas, which caused the gathering of people, exactly what the government wants to prevent at the current time.

One of the most recent volunteering activities that are very useful is having volunteers who are delivering important stuff from the co-ops including food and other necessary items to consumers at their home and free of charge. According to the Ministry of Social Affairs, this service is available even during curfew hours, though it is not yet clear how it will work.

Citizens can volunteer with Kuwait Red Crescent Society through the official website: www.krcs.org.kw. People also can volunteer with the civil defense through the website www.moi.gov.kw/civildefense. The volunteers will be distributed in different sectors including hospitals, quarantine resorts, coops, and other locations.

Even outside Kuwait, many Kuwaiti students abroad, especially in the UK, volunteered with their union to deliver important items to thousands of Kuwaiti students especially after many supermarkets ran out of stock of important items. Kuwait Times will update with more opportunities for volunteering as they are announced.



US Ambassador to Kuwait Alina Romanowski

Coronavirus in Kuwait: What we know so far

KUWAIT: Kuwait has so far recorded 191 cases infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). With the exception of five cases in critical condition, all cases are in stable condition and are recovering in quarantined locations designated by the government for this purpose, while 708 have been discharged from quarantine after exhibiting no symptoms during their 14-day quarantine period, the Ministry of Health confirmed. Meanwhile, 39 people have recovered completely after previously been infected with the virus, the ministry said. There are 152 people receiving treatment and 240 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, the overwhelming majority of them have returned from Iran. Meanwhile, Kuwait requires all expatriates who arrived from travel on March 1 and beyond to visit Kuwait International Fairground where the Ministry of Health has set up a center at Hall 6 to test people for possible infection.

Curfew

Kuwait enforced a country-wide curfew as of Sunday from 5:00 pm to 4:00 am until further notice. Earlier, the government decided to close all shopping malls, beauty salons and barber shops as part of its measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. The government also allowed restaurants to host a maximum of five people at a time and in case there are lines, the distance must be at least one meter between people.

Operating businesses

The following activities are allowed to operate outside of the curfew period between 5:00 am and 4:00 pm:

1. Various types of foodstuff and supplies stores and markets.
2. Laundromats.
3. Various type of repair shops.
4. Automobile repair, maintenance and spare parts.
5. Money exchangers.
6. Pharmacies.
7. Various types of restaurants.
8. Optical shops.
9. Administrative offices.
10. Cooking gas branches.
11. Co-ops' family needs branches.
12. Feed shops.

Meanwhile, the following industrial and craft activities, which are licensed by the Public Authority for Industry (PAI), are allowed to open:

1. Food.
2. Petrochemicals.
3. Gases.
4. Plastic.
5. Cardboard and paper.

Precautions

Kuwait halted all commercial flights to and from the Gulf Arab state starting March 13 and until further notice, with the exception of cargo flights. Authorities also announced a public holiday in the country from March 12 to April 9, with work resuming on April 12, while entities providing vital services will remain open.

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. 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. In the meantime, the Civil Service Commission suspended the biometric fingerprint system for staff attendance until further notice.

Visa suspension

Kuwait suspended issuing entry permits and visas unless those issued through diplomatic missions. Previously, authorities have stopped issuing all kinds of visas (visit, work, etc) for Egyptian nationals, while allowing those who already have a visa to enter only after they take tests in Cairo before coming to Kuwait. In the meantime, Iraq has suspended flights from Kuwait, whereas Saudi Arabia stopped issuing umrah visas for all nationalities as a precautionary measures.

The Civil Service Commission directed all government agencies to bar employees placed under any form of quarantine from resuming work. The ban is applicable on Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti employees. Salary payments will continue as usual to all Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti employees under all kinds of compulsory quarantine.

Types of quarantine

All arrivals to Kuwait from Egypt, China, Hong Kong, South Korea, Italy, Iran, Iraq, Germany, France, Spain, the United States and the United Kingdom are to be placed under quarantine for 14 days. Meanwhile, all arrivals to Kuwait International Airport coming from other countries must enter 14-day mandatory home self-quarantine.

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 (Hawali Educational Zone)
- 51576576 (Farwaniya Educational Zone)
- 51577055 (Jahra Educational Zone)
- 51577655 (Ahmadi Educational Zone)
- 51577951 (Mubarak Al-Kabeer Educational Zone)
- 51578171 (Religious Studies Department)
- 51588599 (Private Education Department)
- 51592515 (Services Department)
- 51594544 (Public Relations Department)

Curfew Diaries

Day 2 - Recycle, reduce, reuse and replenish



Jamie Etheridge

Etheridge@kuwaittimes.com

On the way to the office this morning, I stopped at the mini jamiya (co-op) in Nuzha to pick up some necessities (chocolate chip cookies count, right?). In front of the shop were the usual gathering of delivery trucks, mostly young men in trousers and t-shirts unloading boxes and crates full of bread, chips, milk, rice, canned goods and other items. I sat watching them for a few minutes, thinking about all the invisible hands, the work that happens daily just to keep our world running smoothly.

I've never stopped to think about these delivery guys. When I visit the grocery store in the early mornings, they are often there, clogging the aisles with their carts and trolleys and boxes, stacking the shelves with fresh supplies, unloading vegetables and fruit and refilling the coolers with cheeses and yogurts. More often than not, I've felt annoyed at the way they take up all the room in a grocery aisle, forcing me to squeeze past or back up and take my shopping cart the next lane over.

Today I felt only grateful to see them busy restocking shelves, refilling the supplies of food and groceries, replenishing what we have depleted over the course of a day and night. There might be a pandemic ravaging the globe, economies may have slowed down and people may be fearful, sheltering in their homes and trying to flatten the curve, and still these delivery guys got up this morning, went to work, stocked their vans and trucks and headed out, delivering to each stop on their route like any ordinary day.

At the co-op in Nuzha, I stopped one to ask how he was feeling - how things had changed for him since the start of the pandemic. He didn't speak much English but we chatted for a few minutes. Ahmed, in his mid-30s, says not much has changed. "We have more deliveries. Food is important. We load the trucks...deliveries. There is more pressure, more rush now because of the curfew," he explained.

After a few minutes, he finished his cigarette and nodded toward the truck, politely letting me know he had to go. I was headed to the newspaper and needed to get there and home before the pre-curfew rush, so I thanked him for his time and waved as he drove off.

As I got into my own car and headed toward Shuwaikh, I couldn't help but think about the idea of replenishment. As the coronavirus pandemic has taken over the world, leading entire nations to stay at home, triggering lockdowns and the cancellation of thousands of commercial flights daily as well as much less road traffic around the globe, we've seen a remarkable change in the conditions of the environment.

The videos of dolphins in Venetian canals may have been fake but there's no dismissing the better air quality in Kuwait. The local NGO, Green Kuwait recently commented on the remarkable improvement in air quality as registered by the US Embassy air quality monitor ([https://www.airnow.gov/index.cfm?action=airnow.global_summary#Kuwait\\$Kuwait_City](https://www.airnow.gov/index.cfm?action=airnow.global_summary#Kuwait$Kuwait_City)). China, Italy and New York City have all seen significant improvements in air quality with lower carbon monoxide emissions as the traffic levels have declined.

Typically, when I think about the environment, I focus on the well-worn phrase: Recycle, reduce and reuse. But maybe the pandemic and the resultant curfews can also refocus the world on the idea of replenishing as well.

My family and I do recycle and try to reduce and reuse where we can. But we've never thought about replenishing the earth. This planet supports more than 7.7 billion human beings and imagine if we are all taking from the co-op every day but no one is replenishing what is taken? I'm not sure what that would take or how it could be accomplished, but it's becoming clearer to me that this needs to be a major part of our lives moving forward.

Local

COVID-19 outbreak in Kuwait under control: Health Minister

Crown Prince eulogizes Amiri directives, state's anti-COVID 19 efforts



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah attend the extraordinary cabinet meeting. — Amiri Diwan photos



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah chairs the extraordinary cabinet meeting.

KUWAIT: Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah has assured the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak in Kuwait is manageable. The ministry is monitoring on daily basis some cases of those who had contacted infected people. Sheikh Basel said in an extraordinary cabinet meeting held Monday at Dar Salwa under the chairmanship of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The minister, however, warned that the crisis might worsen in the coming two months as the pandemic is still spreading across the world. After these two months, the number of new infections is expected to slow down before taking a downward curve, he projected. Sheikh Basel said that Kuwait is ready to secure any vaccine for the deadly virus once it becomes available. Kuwait has secured malaria and HIV medicines, which are used to help suppress symptoms of the infection, he unveiled.

Sufficient stockpiles

Meanwhile, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah has assured that Kuwait has huge and ample stockpiles of food and medicine. "We have huge food

and medicine stocks, but we have to manage it wisely," he said during the extraordinary cabinet meeting. His Highness the Premier, however, urged rationalization of consumption to avoid squandering these stockpiles. He also noted that the government is counting the number of Kuwaitis abroad and coordinating with the Ministry of Health to prepare for their evacuation and the medical producers which they will undergo upon their arrival. "We can now say that we are ready for their return soon," Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled stressed. He, however, admitted that nobody knows how long this crisis will last and how hard will it be. Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled said that the government is taking necessary measures according to the developments to protect people's safety.

Kuwait now is in this phase of virus containment and the Ministry of Health has conducted tests for enormous number of people and is about to conclude this phase to pave the way for evacuation of Kuwaiti abroad, he clarified. His Highness Prime Minister thanked His Highness the Amir for his wise directives, and unlimited backing to the government during this delicate time. He also conveyed the cabinet's gratitude to National

Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem and all lawmakers for their support to government. The premier spoke highly about the efforts and sacrifices of the emergency teams in the first and second lines of confrontation against the deadly virus. He pointed out that the government has put in place the emergency plan from the first day of the coronavirus outbreak, but "we are facing a relentless and ruthless enemy, so our measures should be also ruthless." He lauded the cooperation of citizens and residents to implement the preventive measures. His Highness the Prime Minister also was grateful to the private sector, civil society and ordinary people's backing to the government.

Wise directives

Also during the meeting, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah extolled his Highness the Amir

Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's wise directives to the government on tackling the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. His Highness the Crown Prince also praised His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled and his government and all those who are offering sacrifices to protect the dear homeland. He also lauded the government and the National Assembly constructive cooperation during this critical time.

In the meantime, National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem expressed gratitude to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for his directives, instruction and successful management of novel coronavirus outbreak crisis. Ghanem also thanked His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for his efforts in this regard. The chief lawmaker apprised Kuwaiti people unity and their support for their political leadership and

government to implement all preventive and precautionary measures, "which are sometimes harsh," to contain the virus.

Ghanem voiced great appreciation of the tremendous efforts exerted by His Highness the Prime Minister and his inter-agency team to counter the coronavirus challenge. He also spoke highly about the lawmakers' backing to the government during the current crisis. He unveiled that several meetings were held recently between the government and lawmakers. During these meetings, the lawmakers conveyed to the government several proposals to consider and briefed it about Kuwaiti people's feedback about the recent decisions, he said. Ghanem also thanked all medical teams and their supporting teams especially volunteers who stand in the front-line against the respiratory disease as well as donors and residents who support the government's efforts. — KUNA

Kuwait confirms two new virus cases: Health Ministry

KUWAIT: Kuwait confirms two new coronavirus cases during the past 24 hours, said the Health Ministry yesterday. During a press conference, the ministry's spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said that the two cases are related to a Filipino and an Indian residents who were in contact with patients that arrived from the UK, bringing the number of infections in the country to 191 cases. The Spokesman revealed that out of the 191 cases, 39 of them have recovered and 152 are still receiving treatment. He indicated that there are five cases still in the ICU. Some 708 individuals had finished the quarantine period, he affirmed. The Ministry of Health urged the citizens and residents to abide by all the decisions and recommendations issued by authorities.



KUWAIT: Health Ministry spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad speaks during a press conference yesterday. — KUNA

stay at home and avoid contacts when leaving the house for the sake of everyone's health. Dr Sanad said the new virus, no matter how dangerous, "we can reverse its course, but we need to fully understand and have faith in our ability to do so, and limit its spread, and that is not impossible." He added that this was proven through work conducted in the Chinese city of Wuhan, which was the focus of where the virus was first detected, but now things are changing and other areas became the focus of this virus. — KUNA



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Local



KUWAIT: People line up outside a grocery store in Kuwait yesterday before curfew hours started at 5:00 pm. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

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Conditions to acquire permits during curfew

KUWAIT: Those seeking urgent medical treatment, attending doctor appointments or taking care of the sick will be allowed to acquire permits during the 11-hour curfew in Kuwait, the Interior Ministry said in a statement to the press Monday. In the statement, the Interior Ministry indicated that it was important to follow the specific rules to acquire the permit, affirming that those who obtain the document will be monitored through their cellphones to make sure they were attending to the agreed upon business. Violators will be subjected to legal questioning and punishment, added the ministry which urged people to contact the ministry on 25585115 - 25585116 numbers in case of inquiry. Permits could be acquired via <http://curfew.paci.gov.kw>. —KUNA

KFSD, MoH deliver medicine during curfew

KUWAIT: Kuwait Fire Service Directorate (KFSD) and the Health Ministry will be working together to ensure the medicinal needs of citizens and residents were met during the partial curfew. In a press release after his meeting with Health Ministry Undersecretary Dr Abdullah Al-Bader, Director General of (KFSD) Lt Gen Khaled Al-Mekrad said that the decision was made upon an order from Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh. KFSD staff will be tasked with delivering necessary using 170 vehicles, Mekrad revealed. —KUNA



Legalese

Advice for small business owners



By Attorney Fajer Ahmed

This is such a difficult time for all of us. We are shifting and predictions are that 30 percent of businesses will close down this month. Research also shows that restaurants usually have a 16-day buffer from closing down, while retail have 19 days. Because of this distress, I have been getting many questions on how to cut down costs by firing employees. I urge people to support local businesses, as instead of ordering something from an international multi-million or billion-dollar e-commerce website, contact your local supplier and ask them to deliver to you safely.

If you are a business owner, trust that this is a time to reroute and to be creative in your business and to make changes for the long run.

Legal firing

Question: I have to cut costs for my business and I am not sure what to do, as we are not operating at 100 percent. Can I legally fire employees right now? Or can I at least change their position from full time to freelancers?

Attorney Fajer: This is really tough. If you are to fire employees, make sure you are giving them a three-month notice and that you are paying them indemnities. But reconsider this, as it is a tough time for all. As I mentioned above, we are going through a shift right now and businesses will have to shift.

You cannot change positions of employees from full time to freelancers without their permission. Although there are instructions from governments to close down businesses, you can still have your employees legally work from home and change their work timings accordingly.

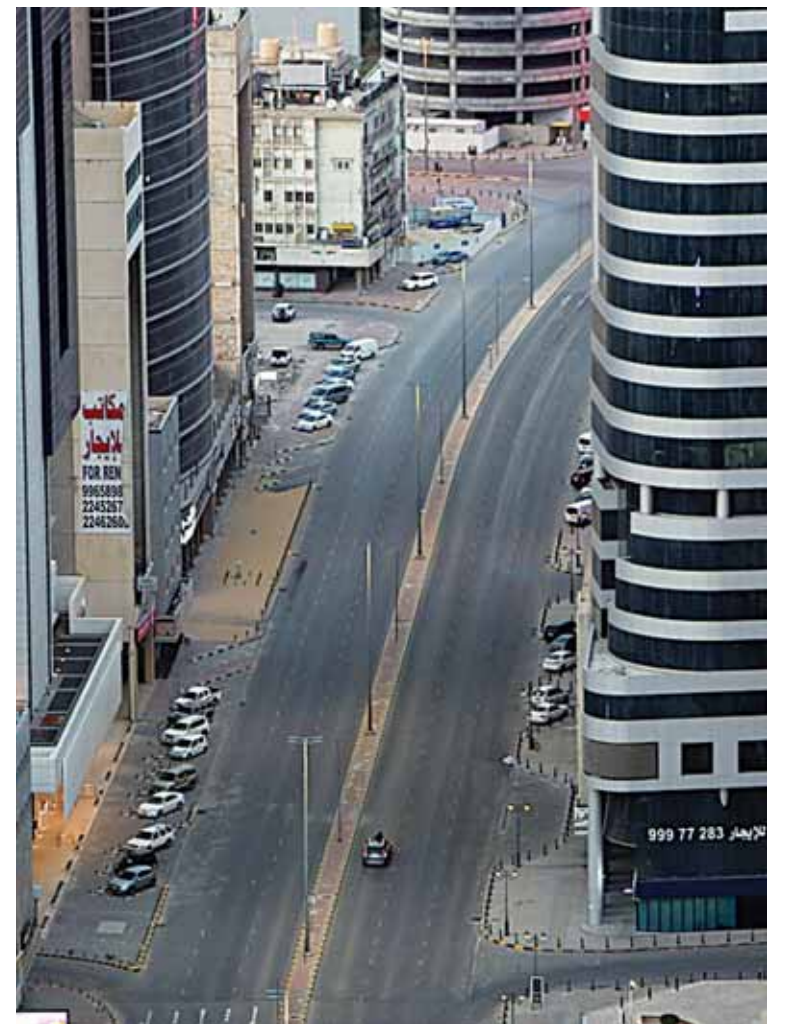
If you would like to provide paid leave to employees right now, you can for those that their leaves have accumulated and if your company policies allow you to do so. Under no circumstance can you deduct salaries from employees right now or fire without cause.

If you want to file for bankruptcy, that is another discussion, feel free to email me about it on fajer@ftl-legal.com

Local



KUWAIT: A combination of photos taken on March 23, 2020, showing deserted highways and empty streets in Kuwait, a day after authorities declared a nationwide curfew amid the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat





UK, New Zealand declare countrywide lockdowns

Private, online and hi-tech: The virus economy

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TEHRAN: Iranian workers set up a makeshift hospital inside the Iran Mall, northwest of Tehran, amid the coronavirus outbreak. —AFP

How serious is virus crisis in Iran?

Coronavirus epidemic kills over 1,800 in Iran

PARIS: Even according to official figures, the coronavirus epidemic has killed over 1,800 people in Iran, prompting unprecedented measures that have included closing holy Shiite shrines. But could the authorities in the Islamic republic be underplaying the severity of the COVID-19 epidemic and the challenge in fighting it? The crisis has come as the country faces one of its most troubled periods since the overthrow of the Shah in 1979, with Iran increasingly estranged from the international community and its economy battered by American sanctions.

Going by official data, Iran is the fourth-worst hit country after Italy, China and Spain. Health ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour has described an uptick of 50 new cases per hour and a new death every 10 minutes. But Persian language media outside Iran, citing figures from regional sources, claim even this grim toll is a lowball. On Saturday, the Prague-based, US-funded Radio Farda said at least 660 more people have died than the official tally. And the exiled National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), outlawed in Iran, has claimed the real death toll could be as high as 8,800.

'Only when it got serious'

"This is a regime that is founded on keeping things hidden," said Azadeh Kian, a professor of sociology at the University of Paris. "It is only when it became very serious that they started to even talk about the coronavirus." She said she had been told by Iranian sources that the first deaths were officially ascribed to breathing difficulties and not coronavirus.

Deputy health minister Reza Malekzadeh has himself admitted Iran was not quick enough to admit the presence of the virus, which was only acknowledged on February 19 despite having been in circulation since January. Iranian authorities have recently been accused by governments and activists of hiding the truth on a succession of issues.

Tehran has been charged with failing to disclose an allegedly significant death toll in a crackdown on anti-government protests in November, and of only admitting the Downing in January of a Ukrainian airliner once the evidence and pressure became too overwhelming to ignore. Its economy has been pushed to the brink of

catastrophe by American sanctions, which Iranian officials denounce as criminal amid the coronavirus epidemic. Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has described restrictions on Iran's ability to import medicine and medical equipment as "economic terrorism". "It was one of the best health systems but now there are no longer the means to buy the vaccines, the masks and essential health products," said Azadeh Kian. Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has batted away US offers of help - which have not included relaxing sanctions - saying the Americans could "bring into our country a drug that will keep the virus alive".

'Can't hide any more'

Thierry Coville, Iran specialist at the French Institute for International and Strategic Affairs, said the authorities initially tried to hide any sign of weakness amid mounting tensions with the United States. But he said the COVID-19 crisis appears to have been taken more seriously in recent weeks. "I have the impression that we hear the health officials more and more and not the

politicians," he said. "The government is beginning to understand that you have to let the specialists talk."

President Hassan Rouhani last month accused the United States of spreading "fear" over the virus, and insisted Iran had the situation under control. Moreover, despite the restrictions of Iran's theocratic system, debate can sometimes be surprisingly open with some moderate newspapers prepared to criticize the government and a well-educated population plugged into the Internet. "If the crisis turns into a catastrophe, they will not be able to hide it any more," said Coville.

The threat became even more acute as Iranians celebrated New Year on March 20 - a time devoted to family meetings and travel which risk spreading the virus. "It does appear they are probably understating, publicly anyway, the severity of the crisis," said Seth Jones, director of transnational threats at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington. And even if the government is honest with the numbers, many fear it could be covering up the scale of the challenge of responding to the crisis. —AFP

Hammered by virus lockdown, the India's poor fear for future

MUMBAI: Shaikh Bahaduresha, 31, lived on Mumbai's streets for two months last year, unable to make ends meet on his meagre taxi-driving profits of roughly \$5 a day. After he got married in December, his wife put some money towards renting a small apartment, and they moved in together. But with much of India now under lockdown to fight the coronavirus, Bahaduresha's newfound stability could come crashing down. He has no more taxi customers, which means he cannot afford food beyond rice and lentils, and will not be able to pay his rent.

"I have no savings. My wife and I will be on the street again," said Bahaduresha as he waited in vain next to shuttered stores for a cab owner who he said owed him a deposit. "The USA is a VIP country, you can block it for a month and it's okay, but in India you have to take care of the poor." Prime Minister Narendra Modi has urged India's 1.3 billion people to stay home and the majority of the country is under lockdown. As of Monday, India had reported 471 cases of the virus and nine deaths. A dozen Indians living in Mumbai's sprawling Dharavi slum said they supported the clampdown, but wanted government support.

The issue highlights how difficult it is for countries to tackle the virus without destroying livelihoods - a challenge that is especially acute in developing nations with significant populations living hand-to-mouth. "So far, the prime minister's intervention has put the onus of responsibility on citizens ... but it has fallen short of explaining clearly what the state is going to do," said Gilles Verniers,



MUMBAI: This aerial picture shows a deserted road during a one-day nationwide Janata (civil) curfew imposed as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 coronavirus in Mumbai. —AFP

a political science professor at Ashoka University near New Delhi. "There is nothing that looks like a national plan on the social front." The prime minister's office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Some markets near the slum were closed and vendors still selling vegetables on the pavement said their distributors were no longer supplying them. Dharavi

residents said they were stretching out meals and forgoing pricier foods such as mutton. Khatun, a frail 70-year-old, wept on her bed as she recounted that her son, who does odd painting jobs, was out of work. Ajay Kewat, 21, said his family only had provisions for a few more days: "I'm afraid that after a week, there won't be food." —Reuters

Turkey sets shop, bus restrictions as death toll hits 37

ISTANBUL: Turkey imposed restrictions yesterday on grocery store opening hours and numbers of shop customers and bus passengers, adding to steps to combat the spread of the coronavirus after the country's death toll from the illness rose to 37. Ankara has already closed schools, cafes

and bars, banned mass prayers and indefinitely postponed matches in its main sports leagues, as well as suspending flights to many countries as it looks to limit the spread of the virus.

Health Minister Fahrettin Koca announced the new death toll overnight and said the number of confirmed cases rose by 293 on Monday to 1,529, with a total of more than 24,000 tests carried out on people. In the latest moves, the Interior Ministry said grocery stores and supermarkets' opening hours will be limited to between 9 am and 9 pm, with a

maximum of one customer for every 10 square metres of shop space.

Buses within towns and between cities will not be allowed to exceed 50% of the vehicle's capacity, with space to be kept between the passengers, the ministry statement said. Separately, the Turkish Competition Board said on Monday night there had been opportunist, excessive food price rises, notably for fruit and vegetable products, and said it would impose severe fines on those found to be responsible.

On Monday evening, the health minister said that Turkey will hire 32,000 more

medical staff and stop exporting locally made face masks so its own services can use them as the coronavirus spreads across the country. He said Turkey had ordered rapid testing kits from China, as well as medicine that he said he been used to treat coronavirus patients - though he did not give details on the treatments. "We have activated the rapid test kit. Today, 50,000 arrived from China. On Thursday, 300,000 additional kits will come, and we have made arrangements to use up to one million kits," Koca told a news conference. —Reuters

Coronavirus kills 2 senior military officers in Egypt

CAIRO: A second senior military officer in Egypt has died of the new coronavirus, state television reported Monday, as the officially declared death toll stood at 14 from 327 cases recorded nationwide. Major General Shafee Dawood, head of major infrastructure projects at the military engineering authority, became the latest high-ranking figure in Egypt to die from COVID-19 in hospital. His death comes after Major General Khaled Shaltout, the army's chief of water management, died from the virus late Sunday. State television said that Shaltout contracted the disease after having taken part in "sterilization" procedures to stave off the virus. Other high-ranking military officials have also been confirmed to have tested positive for the disease, security sources told AFP. The army released a video last week showing tanks spraying disinfectant in major Cairo sites including the central metro station in Tahrir Square, epicenter of the 2011 revolt that toppled former autocrat Hosni Mubarak.

For decades, the military has played a key, though opaque, role in Egypt's economy. Its engineering arm has been behind the construction of a new administrative capital, 50 kilometers east of Cairo, as well as highways and roads. Health ministry spokesperson Khaled Megahed said on Sunday that infections from the COVID-19 virus have been identified in 24 of the country's 27 governorates. President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi said Sunday his government has dealt with the pandemic with "full transparency" and denied the true infection rate is being suppressed.

On social media, Egyptians have been critical of the government's perceived slow handling of the pandemic. Authorities have imposed tough measures to limit social interaction in the country of 100 million inhabitants. They have closed schools and universities, ordered cafes, restaurants, night-clubs, sporting clubs and malls to close by 7:00 pm, and trimmed the civil service workforce. Religious institutions have also shut down churches and called off prayers in mosques to stem the spread of the virus. —AFP

International

Windows of hope: Life in Europe under lockdown

Governments issue 'stay at home' order to fight coronavirus

ROME: From the elderly Italian woman who routinely lines up the glasses of water she sets herself to drink every day, to the British composer leading a virtual orchestra, life for Europeans under coronavirus lockdown is an uncharted mix of resilience and creativity. Hundreds of millions of people have suddenly undergone the biggest change to daily life since World War II as governments order them to stay at home in a bid to beat the disease.

Amid disaster movie-like scenes of deserted streets, the main challenge for many is simply keeping up their spirits despite the boredom and isolation of being confined at home. Whether it's having evening drinks on video phone, chatting to neighbors through open windows, or joining in mass sing-alongs and applause, staying connected with the outside world is key.

Rome

Carla Basagni, 86, a retired artist living in Rome's Trastevere neighborhood, has made herself a routine to get through the days alone. "Since I can't go out, I do gymnastic exercises in my house. I drink at least five times a day: I've got five glasses of water lined up in my kitchen so I don't forget!" she told AFP. But she added that she drinks "only a little wine, even if I love it!"

In Italy, which rolled out new restrictions at the weekend after becoming the new epicenter of the disease, people need a special personal declaration to leave the house confirming that it's for work, grocery shopping or a critical reason such as health. Anyone caught breaching the lockdown risks three months in prison and a 206-euro (\$220) fine. Stuck in her house for nearly 24 hours a day, Basagni says that she cooks "nice little meals, I read, and sometimes I lie down for a little sleep on my sofa or on my bed."

Madrid

Paula Perez, a 19-year-old medical student who lives in a Madrid apartment with her mother, said she was "very moved" the first time she heard the applause for health workers. In their little 50-square-metre apartment, they follow the same ritual every evening: at 8:00 pm, after the applause, neighbors speak to one another out of their windows. "Our neighbor above works in a hospital and tells us what's happening," said Perez.

Spaniards are under strict lockdown and can only leave home to work if they can't do so at home, buy medicines or food, or to briefly walk the dog. Madrid's usually crowded streets are now practically empty. Instead, people play music from their balconies or have lottery parties with their neighbors, shouting out numbers from one window to the other.

Perez's mother Maria Jimenez, 48, an agricultural engineer, works remotely from a table in the front room after all her work visits were cancelled. She speaks every day to her elderly parents in a village in the southern region of Andalucia, while worrying about her siblings, some of whom work in health or for the police. She adds that sometimes she feels "guilty" of being "useless". "I read the newspapers on the internet, we watch the TV news over dinner," adds Perez, "but I don't want to think about the epidemic all day: that makes me anxious."

Paris

Baptiste Saude, a freelance documentary director in his 30s who lives in Paris, says that the "most difficult thing is the absence of any social life". Normally he would play sport or see friends in the evening, but



GRASSOBBIO, Italy: A priest (left) reads prayers from the book of funeral rites by the coffin of a deceased person in the cemetery of Grassobbio, Lombardy yesterday, as pallbearers stand by during a funeral ceremony in the absence of quarantined relatives. — AFP

since the lockdown he's been experimenting with a "Skype apero" - an evening drink via video call - with other locked down friends. France last week adopted similar rules to Italy and Spain except that going out for some "physical activity" is allowed. Violators face a fine of 135 euros. Saude says he, at least, has previous experience of being under lockdown while he was in the French military on a base in Mali. He's also helping elderly people in his neighborhood by calling them for a chat, for example 84-year-old Odile, whom he helps to record herself doing scales for a remote piano lesson.

London

Ben Morales Frost, a composer based in southeast London, is using his self-enforced quarantine to spearhead a global music initiative called "lockdown orchestra". He said that for most musicians "suddenly, the rug's been pulled from underneath them". "So I thought it'd be quite nice to set up a virtual orchestra," he added. Britain has implemented a less stringent shutdown compared to its European neighbors, but last week ramped up its response, closing schools and then ordering all cafes, pubs and restaurants to close until further notice. — AFP

Algeria streets empty but protesters vow to 'keep flame burning'

ALGIERS: The coronavirus pandemic has done what the Algerian regime had failed to achieve for more than a year - clear the streets of massive anti-government protests. Now the "Hirak" citizens movement - which brought down geriatric autocrat Abdelaziz Bouteflika last April - has vowed to adapt and reinvent its struggle for full civil rights and democracy. "We will be back stronger than before," vowed independent journalist Khaled Drareni, who has been arrested several times for covering the demonstrations, on Twitter. "This is an opportunity to go beyond the marches."

In a flurry of ideas being floated on the internet, activists have proposed a "virtual" Hirak on the web, or mass demonstrations held on balconies. "Many proposals are being circulated on this subject - staying completely off the streets on Fridays, a (pot-banging) casserole protest, intensifying social media communications ... all while keeping hope of resuming protest marches as soon as possible," said political scientist Mohamed Hennad. "It is crucial that the flame of Hirak keeps on burning."

For now a major focus has been to harness the mass movement to help combat the pandemic threat and plug the gaps of the public health care system. The North African country by Monday had 201 confirmed infections and reported 17 deaths. Many medical professionals fear the already strained hospitals will soon be overwhelmed. Hirak's role should be one of "solidarity and, if need be, national mobilization against corona," said Said Salhi of the Algerian League for the Defense of Human Rights. "We can set up solidarity, relief, aid, education groups," he wrote.

'Health the top priority'

The Hirak movement erupted on February 22 last



ALGIERS: An empty street in the Algerian capital Algiers. A total of 82 cases of coronavirus COVID-19 have been confirmed in Algeria, according to the health ministry. — AFP

year and scored a spectacular success when, within weeks, it forced the ouster of Bouteflika, now aged 83. Bouteflika had announced plans to run for a fifth term after 20 years in power, despite being debilitated by a 2013 stroke. The emboldened demonstrators stayed on the streets, demanding the dismantling of the wider power structure Bouteflika had built, which they decried as a self-serving and corrupt state. A December election that installed one-time Bouteflika premier Abdelmadjid Tebboune in the presidency was marred by more protests and very low turnout of around 40 percent, according to official data. Since then the Friday rallies of the non-violent and leaderless Hirak movement continued — until last week.

As the virus has swept the world, the government banned demonstrations last Tuesday. But the protesters didn't need to be told and independently suspended rallies on public health grounds. An initial claim made the rounds on social media that the virus was a regime plot to end Hirak - but this was soon dismissed by most protesters. "Requesting a suspension of Hirak is not treason," wrote journalist Akram Belkaid in the Quotidien d'Oran daily newspaper. "It

is to recognize that in life, there are priorities - the first being people's health."

'Anger will come back'

The decision by the protesters to suspend their rallies "revealed a maturity and political consciousness," said Louisa Dris-Ait Hamadouche, a political scientist at the University of Algiers. "This self-accountability signifies that Hirak is a citizen movement engaged in a process of building a new order, rather than just tackling the old order." President Tebboune, meanwhile, faces huge political risk in the event of a botched response to the outbreak, said Jean-Pierre Filiu, a historian at the Sciences Po university in Paris.

"Tebboune draws for now an unprecedented prestige as a head of state acting to forestall the crisis," said Filiu. But "he risks paying very dearly for possible failures in the public response to the pandemic - failures which, as soon as they come, could rejuvenate the protest movement." Yamina Rahou, a researcher at Oran's Centre of Research and Social Anthropology, agreed that "the coronavirus will not kill Hirak but will lay bare the problems in our country's health sector". — AFP

Parking pain: Airlines, airports hunt for space; pandemic idles planes

SYDNEY: As airlines idle thousands of aircraft for which there are no passengers, they are hitting an unprecedented problem: finding a place to park them. Taxiways, maintenance hangars and even runways at major airports are being transformed into giant parking lots for more than 2,500 airliners, the biggest of which takes up about as much room as an eight-story building with a footprint 3/4 the size of an American football field.

The number of planes in storage has doubled to more than 5,000 since the start of the year, according to Cirium data, with more expected to be parked in the coming weeks as carriers like Australia's Qantas Airways Ltd and Singapore Airlines Ltd proceed with further announced cuts to flight schedules. In Frankfurt, Germany's biggest airport is a ghost town of silent airliners. Its northwest landing runway, including taxiways and bridges, has been converted to an aircraft parking lot for Lufthansa, Condor and other airlines. Lufthansa brand Swiss has rented parking spots at a military airport close to Zurich. Similar crowds of planes are parked at other major airports, including Hong Kong, Seoul, Berlin and Vienna as well as traditional desert parking lots in Victorville, California, and Marana, Arizona, according to



PANAMA CITY: A Copa Airlines plane taxis on a runway as others sit on the tarmac at Tocumen International Airport during the global pandemic of the new coronavirus, COVID-19. — AFP

data from flight tracking website FlightRadar24.

In Manila, some Philippines Airlines jets are parked in the Lufthansa Technik Philippines hangar, an airline official said. Even some smaller airports have been converted to parking lots. Avalon Airport west of Melbourne expects to take 50 planes from Qantas and its low-cost offshoot, Jetstar, according to the airport's chief executive, Justin Giddings. "It is sad for everyone, the whole industry," he told Reuters of the groundings, which have led Qantas to put 20,000 staff members on leave.

Qantas is sending 30 engineers to Avalon help

maintain the planes so they can re-enter service in three to seven days when demand returns, according to a source with knowledge of the matter. The carrier is also parking about 100 other aircraft at major airports around Australia and its five ageing 747s at a desert storage facility in Alice Springs, the source said. Qantas declined to comment. Asia Pacific Aircraft Storage (APAS) in Alice Springs is also home to SilkAir and Fiji Airways 737 MAX jets as part of a year-long global grounding that has placed further pressure on the ability to find spots to put other jets. — Reuters

Fear as Trump says virus restrictions could ease soon

NEW YORK: Anxiety ratcheted up Monday across an eerily deserted New York, America's coronavirus epicenter, but President Donald Trump said he'd soon call for lifting the lockdown in some parts of the country. Trump—who faces reelection in November and is keen to avoid extended economic damage—told reporters he would be "opening up our country to business because our country was meant to be open."

The relaxation could be announced early next week when a 15-day period recommending tight restrictions on social distancing expires, he said, stressing that governors would make final decisions in their own states. Health officials and state governors dealing with the worst outbreaks have said they expect restrictions will have to continue for some time and New York's mayor called for a nationwide lockdown. As the number of deaths in the United States from COVID-19 soared to 560, with almost 44,000 declared cases, the Big Apple found itself the US bullseye of the global pandemic.

With millions of residents ordered to stay home and non-essential businesses and schools closed, the city that never sleeps is bedding down for an uncertain slumber. For Christian Hofer, and his wife and two young children, the hardest is not knowing how long the unprecedented measures are going to last. "It goes from a range of emotions, from feeling very nervous about the situation to feeling like how absurd it is," the 42-year-old Wall Street trader said.

New York City has now seen more than 12,000 confirmed cases and almost 100 deaths in the outbreak, which first appeared in the United States in Washington state. With only essential workers, such as pharmacists, grocery store workers, nurses and doctors, headed to work Monday, rush hour in the city was more like a trickle of traffic. New York's yellow cabs were out but passengers appeared few and far between with sidewalks virtually deserted. Underground, normally packed subway cars trundled along close to empty.

'Scared'

"I'm scared for me and patients that this could go on" for months, said Lauren, a psychologist who declined to give her surname. Anxiety and depression "all gets heightened at a time like this," she added, one of the few souls out and about on Manhattan's Upper East Side. On the New York Stock Exchange, the opening bell, usually greeted by cheering and clapping, was met with silence as the first day with no floor trading took place.

Only electronic trading occurred as stocks plunged deep into the red before recovering somewhat, with both the Dow and the S&P 500 closing down around three percent. In Congress, efforts to advance a nearly two-trillion-dollar rescue of the economy failed for a second straight day after Democrats said the Republican proposal insufficiently protected workers.

Trump said he wanted to get restrictions on movement lifted where possible, so that people can get back to work. He acknowledged that medical advisors focused more on public health than the economy may not agree with his decision. "The doctors, if it were up to them, they may say 'let's keep it shut down, let's shut down the entire world,'" said Trump. — AFP

International

China coronavirus epicenter to open up as world locks down

Britain, New Zealand declare countrywide lockdowns

BEIJING: China announced yesterday an end to travel curbs at the epicenter of the coronavirus pandemic, as governments around the world tightened lockdowns affecting 1.7 billion people in a desperate effort to slow the spread of the deadly disease. Hubei province, where the novel coronavirus emerged late last year, will allow healthy residents to travel from midnight, officials said, two months after they were ordered to stay indoors.

The relaxation of rules, which will not apply to the hardest-hit city of Wuhan until April 8, comes as Britain and New Zealand joined nations in Europe, the Middle East, North America and Asia in declaring countrywide lockdowns in a bid to staunch the flow of new infections. The extraordinary measures around the world continued to throw up horrifying tales: soldiers in Spain tasked with fighting the outbreak reported finding abandoned elderly people—some dead—at retirement homes.

And on the deserted streets of New York, one psychologist who ventured out voiced fears over the long-term mental health of everyone affected. "I'm scared for me and patients that this could go on" for months, said Lauren, who declined to give her surname. Anxiety and depression "all gets heightened at a time like this," she added. The financial impact of economies grinding to a halt continued to unnervingly policy makers, who opened the spigots and flooded the markets with yet more cash—their latest effort to keep the wheels turning.

In the United States, the Federal Reserve unveiled an unprecedented bond-buying program, in a move not seen since the global financial crisis more than a decade ago. The Fed, which has already slashed interest rates to record lows, said it will buy unlimited amounts of Treasury debt and take steps to lend directly to small and medium-sized firms hammered by state lockdowns across the country.

Asian markets cheered the news, with Tokyo, Hong Kong and Seoul rocketing in their latest rollercoaster session. That upswing came despite US politicians' failure to sign off on a nearly \$2 trillion package that President Donald Trump says is aimed at supporting ailing enterprises, and helicoptering cash to American families. His opponents say the bill is too heavily weighted to bailing out big business.

The British government, which has faced accusations it dithered over the health crisis and needlessly allowed schools to remain open far longer than

European counterparts, came into line on Monday. Prime Minister Boris Johnson ordered a three-week shutdown of "non-essential" shops and services and banned gatherings of more than two people. "Stay at home," Johnson said in a televised address, as he unveiled unprecedented peacetime measures.

The announcement came after crowds of people were seen enjoying weekend sunshine in parks and countryside, prompting calls for tougher action. World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned that the global pandemic was clearly accelerating. The number of coronavirus deaths has topped 16,200, with more than 360,000



LONDON: A deserted Westminister Bridge is pictured looking north around in central London as governments scramble to defend their own economies against the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic in order to ward off a long-term global recession and future waves of infections. — AFP

declared infections in 174 countries and territories, according to an AFP tally. Tedros said it took 67 days from the beginning of the outbreak in China in December for the virus to infect the first 100,000 people worldwide.

In comparison, it required only 11 days for the second 100,000 cases and just four days for the third 100,000, he said. Tedros acknowledged that many countries were struggling to take more aggressive measures because of a lack of resources but said "we are not helpless bystanders." "We can change the trajectory of this pandemic," he said. There was a glimmer of hope Monday in figures from Italy, the

European ground zero of COVID-19. New infections in the continent's hardest-hit country dipped to just shy of 5,000, down from over 6,500 on Saturday.

Its daily death toll also fell slightly, although cumulatively the country has recorded more than 6,000 fatalities, far-exceeding even that of China. In the United States, New York city was under lockdown, with its usual logjam commute now just a trickle of pharmacists, grocery store workers and medical staff. But Trump—who faces re-election in November and is keen to avoid extended economic damage in the US—told reporters he would soon be "opening up our country to business because our country was meant to be open." — AFP

Private, online and hi-tech: Virus economy

HONG KONG: The coronavirus pandemic has sent stock markets into freefall and industries to the wall, however many firms enabling more private, online and tech-based living are emerging as potential winners. As hundreds of millions of people worldwide are forced to stay in their homes and not travel abroad, the businesses that are helping them to adapt could lead to long-term changes in the economy.

"I think certain aspects of work and organizing will change for good through the current situation," said Sally Maitlis, a professor of organizational behavior at Oxford University's Said Business School. "People will discover that they can work and communicate in ways they previously didn't think possible, and will be forced to become more nimble with tech through having no choice to do otherwise." Here are comparisons of several sectors that are thriving and failing in the pandemic:

E-commerce giants vs stores

Large online retailers have seen a surge in orders as self-isolating or home-working consumers turn to their massive distribution and delivery net-

works to provide daily essentials. Shares in US retail giants Walmart and Amazon both tumbled as markets crashed around the world on March 16. During the week Walmart rose as much as 25 percent from its nine-month low on Monday. Amazon also recovered.

"We are seeing increased online shopping and as a result some products such as household staples and medical supplies are out of stock," Amazon said. Yet small, independent stores are suffering, said UK Federation of Small Businesses chair Mike Cherry. "These are already very difficult times for all small businesses right across the country. There are huge concerns over supply chains while on top of this foot-fall continues to drop. The prospect for these businesses over the coming weeks is increasingly bleak."

Streaming vs cinemas

Demand for movies to watch at home has soared so much that Netflix and YouTube are reducing the quality of their streaming in Europe—which has become the epicentre of the virus—to ease pressure on the internet. World-wide streaming activity jumped by 20 percent last weekend, according to Bloomberg News. Traditional cinema chains, however, are facing an unprecedented drop in demand. Some have temporarily closed their doors to help contain the virus's spread. US-listed shares in Cinemark and AMC Entertainment were both down around 60 percent on Friday from their respective highs in January and February. — AFP

Delhi's rebel gym goers risk virus

NEW DELHI: While top gym chains in India are shuttered over the coronavirus pandemic, many workout dens are defying government orders of a lockdown by staying open for their muscle-bound customers. Exercise fanatics say their need to pump iron is worth the risk, and the gyms' owners keep opening up despite facing police action, meaning the dumbbells carry on being lifted and the treadmills stay turning.

In one cramped gym in a crowded Delhi backstreet, around 20 people are waiting for a turn on one of the 10 machines. "There is fear because every action or government circular comes down to how good the police are," says the owner, who gives only his first name, Rajeev. "It is also a matter of our livelihood."

Rajeev says that shortly after he opened his gym in 2016, the government cancelled more than 80 percent of bank notes to counter the black economy. That badly hit businesses, as did a new national sales tax introduced in 2018. "So we have been under the hammer and now cannot afford to shut

down," he said. Authorities have been cracking down on the gyms, with police in Delhi arresting two owners on Sunday for illegally operating. Four criminal cases were also filed against gyms elsewhere in the capital, police said.

Heat treatment

India, which has reported 10 deaths from around 500 virus cases, staged a one day curfew on Sunday to test its pandemic defenses. Authorities then ordered drastic new restrictions on movement. In between barking out orders to his sweat-soaked members and staff, Rajeev tells how he believes bodybuilders can fight the virus with strong immunity and that India's climate will help.

"India is a very hot country so when the temperature rises and I have learned that temperatures between 25-26 degrees centigrade can destroy this virus," says Singh, highlighting a widely held belief in the country of 1.3 billion people. The World Health Organization has said there is no proof that heat kills the coronavirus. "I have taken action, there is sanitizer. If your immunity level is very strong then you can fight this virus," Rajeev insists. While schools, colleges, swimming pools are closed, and top sporting events like the Indian Premier League cricket are suspended, dozens of gyms are operating across Delhi. India has a booming bodybuilding culture and for many, extra hours are needed to burn off unwanted fat, no matter the risks. — AFP

Fearing hunger, Madagascans defy lockdown

ANTANANARIVO: The fear of hunger propelled vendor Jean Naina Rakotomamonjy to defy a lockdown imposed in Madagascar's capital to curb the spread of coronavirus. "I need to find something for my family to eat today," said the 53-year-old father of three, who sells seafood in the capital Antananarivo, where citizens have been ordered by the president to "stay at home". The same order applies in the island nation's second city Toamasina. "I know the coronavirus can kill. But if I stay home for 15 days, I will die as well," he said.

The vendor was not the only one to defy the new measures announced by President Andry Rajoelina late on Sunday. At the crack of dawn, the usual horde of hawkers and hustlers were out and about in Antananarivo's narrow streets. "I do not have the means to save money and stock up on provisions," said Rakotomamonjy, who managed to get on a minibus before armed soldiers put up roadblocks and ordered public transport to turn back.

The poor Indian Ocean nation has so far detected 12 cases of the novel coronavirus, which has infected more than 340,000 people worldwide and killed over 15,000. "Those who don't respect these measures will suffer severe penalties," the



ANTANANARIVO: Malagasy Army takes position in the streets of Antananarivo yesterday. President Andry Rajoelina on Sunday ordered lockdowns in Madagascar's two main cities to try to contain the spread of the coronavirus across the poor Indian Ocean nation. — AFP

president warned in a televised broadcast on Sunday night.

'We choose to live'

But the army's presence has done little to keep citizens at home. In Antananarivo, private cars and pedestrians seamlessly passed through check points as they went about their daily business. "Where do you come from? Where are you going?" asked nonchalant soldiers, rifle in hand, before waving them through. "I have just bought shrimps... and I have to get to Besarety market to sell them, but there are no buses," Rakotomamonjy complained, balancing a dripping 10-kg sack on his head. "If I do not hurry, my

clients will think that I am not working today," he added.

Pedestrians crowded the street around him, seemingly unaware of universal calls to maintain a distance from others to avoid contamination. At the bustling Antohamadina market, a 30-minute walk from the city centre, stalls continued to line the footpath, despite soldiers standing nearby. "We have to choose between dying from coronavirus or of hunger and confinement," said a woman selling tea leaves. "Today we choose to live," she said. Ninety percent of Madagascar's 25 million inhabitants survive on less than one dollar per day. Hunger is a daily reality for most and many children do not attend school. — AFP

Cameras are watching Moscow quarantined

MOSCOW: A vast and contentious network of facial recognition cameras keeping watch over Moscow is now playing a key role in the battle against the spread of the coronavirus in Russia. The city rolled out the technology just before the epidemic reached Russia, ignoring protests and legal complaints over sophisticated state surveillance. Since last month, thousands of Muscovites have been confined to their homes for 14 days of compulsory quarantine after returning from virus-hit countries, being in contact with those infected or diagnosed with mild symptoms.

Police have logged their details and warned them that sneaking out into the city of 16 million residents and daily visitors could lead to a five-year jail term or deportation for foreigners. "We are constantly checking that this regulation is being observed, including through the use of automated facial recognition systems," Mayor Sergei Sobyanin wrote in his blog in February.

The Russian capital already had a tight network of 170,000 security cameras, set up in streets and metro stations throughout the city over the past decade. Around 100,000 have now been linked to artificial intelligence systems that can identify people being filmed. The remaining cameras are due to be connected soon. Moscow police said last week that the cameras that are linked have allowed



MOSCOW: A picture shows a surveillance camera in an underground passage in Moscow. A vast and contentious network of facial-recognition cameras keeping watch over Moscow is now playing a key role in slowing the rapid spread of coronavirus in Russia. — AFP

them to identify almost 200 people who broke quarantine rules.

As well as the cameras, Russia has said it is drawing on an array of technology to fight the virus, including telemedicine consultations, the real-time monitoring of supermarket shelves and identifying and removing false news stories from social media. President Vladimir Putin last week toured a hi-tech centre set up to monitor the virus situation and Russia's response. The country, as of Monday, had reported 438 coronavirus infections, most of them in Moscow. One person who was infected has died but officials are not linking the death to the virus.

600 neighbors

Moscow City Hall has boasted that the network of cameras is a particularly effective tool.

Sobyanin has said that the authorities have contacts and work addresses for 95 percent of those quarantined after returning from high-risk countries. "We've identified where they are," said the mayor, who heads a working group on combatting the virus set up by Putin. Last month on his blog he praised the efficiency of the facial recognition system with a story of a Chinese woman who tested positive soon after arrival and was hospitalised. Her flatmate was quarantined but security cameras filmed her walking outside and meeting a male friend. The mayor added that the authorities swiftly gathered contacts of more than 600 of the woman's neighbors and even her taxi driver from the airport. Facial recognition technology was first tested during the 2018 World Cup in Russia before going fully online in January, just before the pandemic hit. — AFP

Business

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A picture shows the closed compound of the Dubai Mall amid the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic on March 23, 2020 in the United Arab Emirates. —AFP

Shutdowns to hit Dubai's economic lifeline

City's vast malls largely deserted prior to shutdowns today

DUBAI: Dubai is closing its famous malls and halting all passenger flights, capping a series of shutdowns on once-thriving sectors that serve as its economic lifeline but which have been sacrificed to curb coronavirus. A few days after barring foreigners, including those with residency permits, from entering the country, the emirate said it would close its airports to commercial flights, shut shopping centers and restrict restaurants to home deliveries.

Within hours of the announcement, which will be enforced by today, the city's vast malls were already largely deserted, with corridors and concourses empty and shops devoid of customers. Boasting the most diversified economy in the Gulf, Dubai derives 94 percent of its public revenues from non-oil sources which also make up the majority of its gross domestic product.

The city-state presents itself as a global hub for tourism, trade and finance, boasting one of the biggest real estate markets in the region. The glitzy emirate, which last year welcomed 16.8 million visitors, has now completely shut tourism outlets, directly impacting hundreds of hotels and countless

dining and entertainment facilities—the backbone of an economy already stressed by a downturn.

Dubai carrier Emirates Airline, the biggest in the Middle East, transported some 90 million passengers last year, while Dubai Airport retained its status as the biggest for international passengers, serving 89 million travellers. In the wake of the airports announcement Emirates said it would suspend all passenger flights by March 25, and Abu Dhabi-based carrier Etihad said it would also temporarily halt all its flights to and from its home base.

The UAE—which takes in seven emirates including Dubai—has so far announced a stimulus package worth \$35 billion which includes injections into the stock market and support for various sectors.

Bad timing

The UAE on Friday announced its first two deaths from the COVID-19 disease, having reported more than 150 cases so far. Capital Economics said that efforts to contain the coronavirus “look set to hit tourism sectors across the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region hard.”

In several Mideastern countries, including Dubai, tourism accounts for about 12.5 percent of GDP, the London-based consultancy said in a report. Dubai is vulnerable to the hit to the sector, it said, especially as the shutdown is taking place at Dubai's peak time for arrivals, when the climate is cooler and welcoming, ahead of the scorching summer.

“According to Mastercard, tourist spending in the Emirate was the largest of any city in the world last year,” it said. If the travel restrictions continue until the end of the second quarter as currently assumed, “we estimate that the downturn in tourism sectors will directly knock at least 2-3 percent off GDP this year,” Capital Economics said. This comes at a time when Dubai has been battling a downturn in which GDP grew by just 1.9 percent and 2.1 percent in the past two years, the weakest since the 2008 global financial crisis.

Expo threatened

Wholesale and retail trade represents a quarter of Dubai's GDP, worth in excess of \$25 billion. The health ministry and the disaster management author-

ity said in a statement early Monday that the move to shut malls would come into force within 48 hours and last “for a renewable period of two weeks”. Dubai's vast shopping centers include Mall of the Emirates, which has its own indoor ski slope, and Dubai Mall which is one of the world's largest and is next to Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest structure. The coronavirus closures also come at a time when Dubai prepares for the global trade fair, Expo 2020, scheduled to open in October.

Organizers said on Sunday that they will “re-assess and adjust” preparations due to the novel coronavirus outbreak. Many of Dubai's economic forecasts had been based around the event and any decision to cancel or postpone it will be a heavy blow.

The emirate has spent tens of billions of dollars to develop its infrastructure and services to be ready to host the six-month fair, with the hope of attracting around 25 million visitors. Dubai's bourse has also been hammered in the crisis, shedding a third of its value since the start of March. On Monday, it dipped 3.8 percent. — AFP

IMF urges action to face 'big drop' in Mideast growth

DUBAI: The International Monetary Fund called for urgent action from Middle East governments yesterday as the coronavirus pandemic threatens a persistent slump in oil revenues and a “big drop” in growth. The International Monetary Fund said a dozen Middle East and North African countries had already approached it for financial support.

It urged governments across the region to swiftly draw up rescue packages to head off a protracted recession. “The region is likely to see a big drop in growth this year,” the IMF's regional director for the Middle East and Central Asia, Jihad Azour, said in a report.

The IMF had already substantially cut its growth projections for the region over low oil prices, civil unrest and US sanctions against Iran. The coronavirus pandemic has triggered a 50 percent fall in oil prices that has slashed government revenues across the region.

“The coronavirus pandemic has become the largest near-term challenge to the region,” Azour said.

“The pandemic is causing significant economic turmoil in the region through simultaneous shocks—a drop in domestic and external demand,

a reduction in trade, disruption of production, a fall in consumer confidence, and tightening of financial conditions.” The coronavirus shutdown is hurting sectors that are major sources of employment like tourism, hospitality and retail, with rising joblessness and falling wages the likely results, he said. IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva said Monday that world economic growth will be negative this year and could be worse than the 2008 global financial crisis, further sapping demand for Middle East oil.

Seeking support

A dozen countries in the Middle East and Central Asia have asked the International Monetary Fund for financial support in dealing with the coronavirus, and the Kyrgyz Republic is likely to receive the first emergency disbursement, the fund said.

Governments should spare no expense to help their health systems and strengthen social safety nets, despite already squeezed budgets, Jihad Azour, director of the fund's Middle East and Central Asia Department, wrote in an IMF blog. “Economic policy responses should be directed at preventing the pandemic - a temporary health crisis - from developing into a protracted economic recession with lasting welfare losses to the society through increased unemployment and bankruptcies.”

He said central banks should be ready to provide liquidity to banks particularly to support lending to small and medium-sized enterprises, while conventional fiscal measures to support the economy - such as spending on infrastructure -



In this file photo, IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva speaks at a press briefing in Washington. — AFP

could be considered once the crisis begins to dissipate. The IMF said it was working to expedite approval of emergency funding requests from the region, and a first disbursement since the outbreak would be considered this week for the Kyrgyz Republic.

“With three-quarters of the countries reporting at least one confirmed case of COVID-19 and some facing a major outbreak, the coronavirus pandemic has become the largest near-term challenge to the region,” Azour said, referring to the disease associated with the virus. Fragile and conflict-torn states such as Iraq, Sudan and Yemen, face an especially daunting challenge. — Agencies

Oil rallies after Fed moves to help economy

SINGAPORE: Oil prices rallied at the open in Asia yesterday on Federal Reserve measures to boost the coronavirus-hit US economy, offsetting concerns about a failure to approve a rescue package.

US benchmark West Texas Intermediate was up 4.3 percent at \$24 a barrel while Brent crude, the international benchmark, rose 3.8 percent to \$28 a barrel. Prices have fallen to multi-year lows in recent weeks as lockdowns and travel restrictions to fight the virus hit demand, and top producers Saudi Arabia and Russia engage in a price war. The Fed unveiled a batch of additional aggressive measures to support the economy on Monday, including buying unlimited amounts of US Treasury debt and new steps to lend directly to small- and medium-sized companies.

Still, gains on stock and oil markets were capped when Democrats again blocked a massive rescue package for the teetering US economy. The bill had proposed funding for American families, thousands of shuttered or suffering businesses and the nation's critically under-equipped hospitals. AxiCorp chief markets strategist Stephen Innes said optimism over the package has helped dampen the oil market sell-off. But he cautioned: “The problem is, however, all the money in the world is not going to get people back on planes so long as the virus is spreading, and travel bans are in place.” — AFP

Business

At Alibaba's Lazada, virus measures become the latest culture conflict

Company denies issues with staff over coronavirus steps

SINGAPORE: At Lazada, the Southeast Asian arm of Alibaba Group Holding, staff are furious over demands they submit health reports daily and other coronavirus-prevention steps seen as too invasive, highlighting a long-running culture clash with management from China.

Since February, Singapore-based Lazada has asked all employees to answer detailed questions seven days a week about their health and where they have been lately, according to five people with direct knowledge of the matter. While the e-commerce firm describes the health reports as not mandatory, employees receive frequent calls from human resources, even on weekends, to make sure reports are submitted, the people said.

Lazada has also asked Singapore employees to wear masks at work, contrary to guidance from authorities, and has also considered urging employees to refrain from attending religious gatherings, they said. The five employees, who said staff anger was widespread, detailed the measures to Reuters on condition of anonymity because they fear retribution. Three showed Reuters a copy of a health report they had submitted. Such measures are not unusual in China, which has imposed draconian rules to contain the virus. But they are seen as a huge invasion of privacy by many Lazada staff in countries that include Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand.

The conflict illustrates how Alibaba's business practices have sometimes played poorly abroad and hindered its overseas ambitions. It also shows how tensions can emerge within global companies as they struggle with the virus crisis. "How does the company use the information gathered daily? Nobody is able to explain," said one of the employees, expressing concern that Lazada might pass on the information to governments. Magnus Ekblom, Lazada Group Chief Strategy Officer, denied there were issues with staff unhappiness over the measures in a statement to Reuters. "Lazada has a clear top priority to safeguard the well-being of our team and the community around us," the statement said. "Our approach is in line with the recommendations made by the various governments in nations we operate in."

Sources also say this is just the latest chapter in Alibaba's struggles to manage Lazada, a company it owns 90% of after investing \$3 billion since 2016 and where morale has been rapidly declining.

Once the top e-commerce firm in Southeast Asia when Alibaba first invested, Lazada has now fallen behind rivals in a fast-growing market of 650 million Southeast Asia consumers across six countries, according to market researchers. Underlining management woes have been the quick departures of Alibaba executives dispatched to Lazada, with the latest co-president of the unit leaving in January after less than 18 months. "Some Alibaba executives sent to Lazada have the natural tendency of pushing things the Alibaba way because it proved right in China," said Jianggan Li, the founder of Singapore-based tech investment firm Momentum Works. "Many tend not to have enough respect for the market, and patience to understand the market deeply," he said, adding that Alibaba's international efforts were still in their early days and the tech giant probably had the determination to learn from mistakes. Alibaba declined to comment on issues at Lazada for this article.

Pushback

The sources told Reuters many employees had raised their concerns to managers via meetings, emails and messages on DingTalk, an app developed by Alibaba that enables managers to keep constant tabs on staff. The request that employees at Singapore headquarters wear masks resulted in many queries as it runs counter to guidance from Singapore authorities who recommend masks only if feeling unwell. "People are confused. If they think working in the office is that dangerous, they should've asked us to work from home," one employee told Reuters. There were also suggestions from Chinese managers about asking employees to reduce social activities, including religious gatherings, though those steps were not implemented in the face of employee resistance, the sources said.

The pushback has resulted in some changes, as some countries where Lazada operates, such as the Philippines, have stricter privacy laws than China. On



March 10, Lazada added a paragraph on privacy protection to the terms of its health check-in program. "All personal data collected from the daily health check-in program shall be processed in accordance with the local data privacy laws," said an updated version reviewed by Reuters.

Clashes and departures

According to sources, senior Lazada executives from China have often been quick to impose what has worked for the mainland Chinese market with little regard to local needs or sensitivities in Southeast Asia's fragmented markets. Some failed strategies include temporary halts to free shipping in some markets which drove merchants to other sites, and attempts to promote bulk buying, the sources said. They added that these mistakes and a tendency for China executives to have key discussions without local input have taken their toll on Lazada's business performance and on morale.

At job search website Glassdoor, anonymous

employee reviews are mostly very critical. Among those that were positive, several said they were writing at the explicit request of Lazada CEO Pierre Poignant who asked employees in a townhall to write glowing reviews. Lazada did not address a Reuters query about the reviews in its statement. E-commerce in the region was worth \$38 billion last year and is expected to grow rapidly, according to a study by Google, Temasek and Bain & Company.

Alibaba does not break out Lazada's financial performance or disclose market share, but market researchers say Lazada now lags Singapore-based Shopee, which is backed by Alibaba arch-rival Tencent Holdings Ltd. Shopee was the most downloaded e-commerce app and the most used in the region as of end-2019, knocking Lazada to second place, according to research firm iPrice. Shopee's website also attracts more visitors than Lazada's, iPrice said. In Indonesia, the region's biggest economy, Lazada trails Shopee and homegrown marketplace Tokopedia, analysts add. —AFP

Instacart to add 300,000 'shoppers'

SAN FRANCISCO: Grocery delivery service Instacart on Monday announced plans to double the ranks of "shoppers" who fill orders in North America as people hunker down to reduce coronavirus risk.

The San Francisco based firm said it wants to add another 300,000 "full-service shoppers" during the coming three months to meet soaring demand for grocery delivery or pick-up.

"The last few weeks have been the busiest in Instacart's history and our teams are working around the clock to reliably and safely serve all members of our community," chief executive Apoorva Mehta said in a release. "Instacart shoppers have stepped up as household heroes for families, grandparents, and people in need coast-to-coast."

Instacart is part of the "gig economy" and serves as a platform connecting people seeking grocery deliveries with those willing to handle the task for a fee.

The company has seen order volume in North America surge by more than 150 percent compared to this time last year, with customers placing larger orders than was typical before people began avoiding shopping excursions due to the coronavirus, according to Instacart.

The move follows announcements by Amazon and Walmart last week on hiring massive numbers of temporary workers to handle increased demand by those turning to the retail giants' food and supplies during the crisis. The search for workers comes as many in the US see their jobs vanish as people spend less money on travel, restaurants, hotels, and non-essential goods.

"As more people look for immediate, flexible earnings opportunities during this time, we hope that Instacart can be an additional source of income for those looking to earn while also delivering for the communities in which they live," Mehta said.

Although Instacart shoppers lack many of the advantages of regular employees, the company last year launched a program offering some benefits including accident insurance and access to health plans. —AFP

Twitter lowers earnings outlook

SAN FRANCISCO: Twitter on Monday dialed back its earnings expectations for the current quarter amid a massive disruption in online advertising stemming from the coronavirus pandemic, even though the service has become a hub

Australia CB pumps in more liquidity

SYDNEY: Australia's central bank injected A\$6.9 billion (\$4.1 billion) into the financial system yesterday and bought A\$4 billion in bonds as economists predicted a spike in unemployment and the worst recession in the country's history due to the coronavirus. The Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) has flooded the system with nearly A\$65 billion cash since March 12 when a liquidity crunch sent global markets into a tailspin. It has also purchased A\$13 billion in government bonds since launching its "unlimited" quantitative easing program on March 20.

The RBA has so far been successful in flattening the yield curve as it aims to keep short-term yields around the cash rate of 0.25 percent. A recession - the country's first in nearly three decades - is still inevitable. Westpac economist Bill Evans expects the unemployment rate to surge to 11.1 percent in the June quarter, up from his last week's estimate of 7 percent and February's official reading

Qantas probed over using crisis to try to sink rival

SYDNEY: Australia's consumer watchdog said yesterday it was investigating Qantas for alleged anti-competitive behavior, after its CEO appeared to call for rival Virgin Australia to be cut out of a massive government bailout. Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) chair Rod Sims told AFP he had received a letter from Virgin Australia chief executive Paul Scurrah alleging Qantas had engaged in anti-competitive behavior by "trying to send a message that Virgin was in trouble and would not survive" the coronavirus crisis.

Qantas CEO Alan Joyce told Sky News last week that Australia's government should "not look after the badly managed companies which have

of 5.1 percent. He sees an economic contraction of 3.5 percent in that period. Citibank economist Josh Williamson predicted the A\$2 trillion economy would shrink 1.2 percent in the current quarter and 5.7 percent next quarter, which would be the largest on record.

Worryingly, the effects of the virus are likely to linger. "We forecast a U-shaped, rather than a V-shaped recovery in economic activity," Williamson added. "Most importantly, we don't see the economy producing quarterly output in dollar terms equal to the pre-coronavirus period until Q4 2021." The total number of coronavirus cases in Australia skyrocketed to almost 2,000 yesterday after the most populous state of New South Wales recorded its biggest daily leap. Secondary data yesterday showed a sharp deterioration in services sector activity in March, underlining the hit from the coronavirus.

The CBA Services PMI fell to a record low of 39.8 as restaurants, cafes and tourism were hit hard by travel bans and cancellations of events and concerts. A separate analysis of card spending data by Commonwealth Bank of Australia showed shopping outside of grocery, alcohol and healthcare was bleak. And a weekly gauge of consumer confidence by ANZ-Roy Morgan

been badly managed for 10 years" and should not nationalize Virgin if it falters.

Joyce also told a news conference the global coronavirus outbreak had plunged airlines into a "survival of the fittest" and Qantas was "making sure we are last man standing", comments Sims said he found "very unhelpful and inconsistent with the time of crisis that we're in". Qantas and Virgin have suspended all international routes and slashed domestic flights after Australia shut its borders to limit the spread of COVID-19.

The aviation sector has received a Aus\$715 million (US\$420 million) bailout from the Australian taxpayer. "Australia went into this crisis with two full service airlines and it's really important that we come out the other end with two full service airlines," insisted Sims.

"We don't want to damage the structure of the economy, so that when the health crisis is over, we can rise up



SYDNEY: A man walks past the Reserve Bank of Australia in the central Business District of Sydney. —AFP

plunged to a 30-year low of 72.2 points. The government has responded to the crisis, with a stimulus package of A\$66.1 billion on top of A\$17.6 billion in support announced earlier this month though economists said a third package might be needed.

"Given the enormity of the current crisis, what we once would have called

economic 'stimulus' will instead have to be large and permanent support for jobs, work and incomes, not temporary and targeted relief," think tank the Australian Institute said. "Australia's economic response will need to take the form of a war effort: a public-led mobilization of resources on a scale not witnessed in our lifetimes." —Reuters



SYDNEY: A Qantas Airways plane takes off at Sydney Airport in Sydney. Australia's biggest airline Qantas said it would halt all international flights and suspend 20,000 staff in response to the coronavirus pandemic, days after the island nation's other main carrier Virgin shut its overseas routes. —AFP

and be ready to go. So we don't want the sort of structural change that might be being suggested by Mr Joyce." Sims said that if the ACCC found substance to the allegations Qantas could find itself in court, potentially facing hundreds of millions of dollars in penalties. "So the ramifications would be quite

serious, but I don't want to get ahead of ourselves, we're at an early stage of an investigation," he said. The next step in the ACCC probe would be to contact Qantas, which Sims expected would occur "very soon". Qantas and Virgin did not immediately respond to requests for comment. —AFP

of conversation about the crisis.

The San Francisco company is among numerous firms expected to take a hit from the crisis, which has already altered many consumer and online habits. Twitter said it is "withdrawing" its earlier forecast for the first quarter of 2020 and now expects an operating loss along with declining revenues.

Online advertising is expected to be impacted by the pandemic as many marketing campaigns

are cut back, and ad targeting is thrown into chaos. Chief financial officer Ned Segal said the downturn has hit the tech platform after starting the year on a promising note.

"The COVID-19 impact began in Asia, and as it unfolded into a global pandemic, it has impacted Twitter's advertising revenue globally more significantly in the last few weeks."

Chief executive Jack Dorsey said Twitter remains committed "to serve the public conversa-

tion," during the crisis. "We're seeing a meaningful increase in people using Twitter, and our teams are demonstrating incredible resilience adapting to this unprecedented environment," he said.

The number of people using Twitter daily has climbed 23 percent to 164 million from the first quarter last year, with the coronavirus pandemic a main topic of conversation at the one-to-many messaging platform, according to the company. —AFP

Business



KUWAIT: stc holds Annual General Meeting (AGM) at the Company's Headquarters on Monday.



stc holds AGM, reports a net profit for KD 43.6m for 2019

Total revenues KD 293.7 million • Cash dividends of 50 fils per share

KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company (stc), a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, held its Annual General Meeting (AGM) at the Company's Headquarters - Olympia Mall / West Office Towers on 23 March 2020, where the attendance represented 67.90 percent from the total shareholders.

The AGM approved the Board of Directors' report, the Auditors' report and the Sharia Committee's report for the fiscal year ended on 31 December 2019. The AGM also approved the Audit Committee report and the Corporate Governance report including the Board of Directors' and the Executive Management's remuneration and benefits report for the year ended on 31 December 2019 as well as approving all the other items in the AGM agenda. In addition, the AGM approved the Company's financial statements and the Board of Directors' recommendation to distribute cash dividends of 50 Kuwaiti fils, representing 50 percent of the share's nominal value for the year ended 2019, to all the shareholders registered in the Company's records, on the Record Date, Wednesday 8 April 2020, where the cash dividends will be distributed for the eligible shareholders on the Payment Date, Wednesday 15 April 2020.

Dr Mahmoud Ahmad Abdulrahman, stc's Chairman, stated, "Despite the difficult market conditions and the fierce competition in the Kuwaiti telecommunications market - one of the most competitive markets in the region, stc managed to achieve revenues of KD 293.7 million for the year ended on 31 December 2019, with a percentage growth of 2 percent compared to 2018. In 2019, stc's EBITDA recorded a growth of 6 percent to reach KD 82.4 million compared to KD 77.8 million for the same period in 2018. Meanwhile, stc's focus on driving business efficiency was clearly reflected by the Company's strong EBITDA margin that reached 28 percent in 2019 compared to 27 percent in 2018. As a result, stc achieved a net profit of KD 43.6 million

(earnings per share of 87 fils) in 2019 with a profit margin of 15 percent. Furthermore, stc's commitment to deliver value to its shareholders is reflected by the increase in total shareholders' equity reaching KD 215.4 million by the end of 2019, with a book value of 431 Kuwaiti fils per share."

stc has achieved these results by implementing the digital transformation strategy and offering integrated technology solutions to its customers, both individuals and enterprises. stc has also driven its business operations into new areas of sustainable growth, through a series of innovative initiatives aimed at improving operational efficiency, enhancing customer experience, as well as delivering the best services and products to meet customer needs. Furthermore, and in addition to investing in the advanced 5G infrastructure, the Company has the largest 5G network with 100 percent coverage of the populated areas at the end of 2019.

Dr. Mahmoud concluded, "While 2019 has marked an exceptional number of achievements for stc, illustrated in launching the new brand 'stc' and the 5G services commercially nationwide as well as acquiring 100 percent of the share capital of Qualitynet - the leading internet service provider in Kuwait - in 2020, stc intends to create new opportunities and enable digital transformation in line with the Company's new strategy.

Free internet and unlimited local calls for stc customers

As part of its social responsibility commitment to support the community, stc provided customers with free unlimited local calls to all mobile networks, as well as free 5GB internet daily from March 22nd until April 20th. This initiative falls in line with stc's ongoing corporate social responsibility framework in battling the current global Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, in addition to its ongoing activities focusing on health, safety and spreading awareness. stc automatically



activated the unlimited local minutes to all prepaid and postpaid customers.

To activate the free 5GB internet package, stc customers are requested to send a text message on a daily basis with the code "85" to 567, for both postpaid and prepaid plans, without fair usage policy.

Throughout this critical period, and with the series of precautionary measures and instructions announced by the Kuwaiti government, stc advises all its customers and the citizens of Kuwait to comply with the government's request, stay at home, while enjoying free local calls and internet without worry. Supporting the local community at critical times comes as a key pillar in stc's corporate social responsibility model.

Implementing the highest safety standards

In line with stc's commitment to streamline its operations and maintain clear communication channels with stakeholders and shareholders, the Company took extra precautions to ensure that all health and safety measures were implemented, including holding the AGM at stc's headquarters in Olympia Mall. In addition to that, the Company shared a live stream link that

is implemented on the stc website with all shareholders, media representatives and investor community to view the AGM online without needing to attend in person. This initiative was executed to enhance stc's investor relations activities through effective communication channels with shareholders, enabling stc's digital transformation framework.

It is worth mentioning that stc organized, launched and participated in a series of initiatives during the past period to battle the COVID-19 pandemic in Kuwait. stc recently launched its "Stay Safe" campaign which aims to raise awareness and educate the public on the current outbreak 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 free unlimited voice calls to those staying at Al-Khiran Resort and Joan Resort at Julai'a. The Company had also facilitated free communication channels connecting its customers to the Ministry of Health hotlines to report any incidents or request any further assistance. stc also visited Kuwait International Airport to distribute face masks, sanitizers and information leaflets to airport staff, departing and returning passengers. The medical items distributed to all individuals were provided by AAW Pharmaceuticals in cooperation with stc.

In this regard, stc recently launched a dedicated page on its official website including the latest news articles, official announcements and precautionary instructions accessible to the public with regards to COVID-19. Visitors will find the official social media accounts of various government entities, link to the official COVID-19 statistics website in Kuwait and other relevant information. The page also includes informative videos provided by the Ministry of Health, as well as full coverage of stc's various initiatives to tackle the outbreak and reduce the spread of the infection.

Fed ramps up help to US economy

WASHINGTON: The Federal Reserve launched an unprecedented effort on Monday to flood the US economy with money amid the chaos caused by the coronavirus pandemic, as Congress debated a rescue plan for American workers and companies.



In this file photo US Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell gives a press briefing after the surprise announcement. — AFP

Like patients around the world battling the disease itself, the US economy is on life support, with some forecasters projecting a 14 percent contraction in the April-June quarter while the global economy could shrink 1.5 percent this year.

About a third of Americans have been ordered to stay at home, and the Fed warned of "severe disruptions" from the virus as it rolled out another series of measures to pump funds into the economy, including buying unlimited amounts of government debt—a move akin to printing money.

Virus shockwave rocks airplane manufacturers

SYDNEY/MONTREAL: The pandemic is taking its toll on aerospace manufacturing, with Boeing Co saying it would halt production of most widebody jets and Airbus SE restarting only partial output after a four-day shutdown as suppliers cut jobs.

With airlines unable to fly because of a collapse of demand over fears of contagion, reinforced by air travel restrictions, planemakers and their suppliers are under pressure to save cash to ride out a squeeze in liquidity. Moody's cut its outlook for the aerospace

and defense industry to negative from stable and warned that even when markets recover, the damaged balance sheets of most airlines would hurt demand for new aircraft. Global passenger capacity fell 35 percent last week, the worst since the start of the crisis, according to data from airline schedules firm OAG, which said deeper cuts were likely in the coming weeks.

More than 2,500 planes have already been grounded this year, data from Cirium shows, with taxiways, maintenance hangars and even runways at major global airports turning into giant parking lots.

On Tuesday, Asian jet fuel refining margins - the difference in value between raw crude and the refined product - turned negative for the first time in over a decade, suggesting there was no recovery timeframe in sight for the aviation industry.

Large US carriers have drafted plans for a possible

halt in US passenger air traffic, four officials said on condition of anonymity, though there is no plan in place and US President Donald Trump said on Monday he was not considering a domestic travel ban.

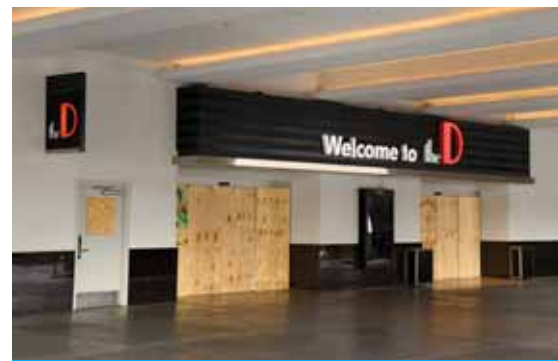
Boeing faces the shutdown of key assembly lines for the second time in a year after being forced to halt production of its grounded 737 MAX aircraft in January.

Production of long-haul jets like the 787 and 777 in Washington state will pause for 14 days starting Wednesday, forcing the world's largest industrial building, the giant Boeing wide-body plant at Everett north of Seattle, to fall silent for the first time in recent memory.

As the crisis deepens, US lawmakers are considering changing some of about \$58 billion in proposed emergency loans to the airline industry to cash grants to cover payroll costs, four people familiar with the

Pandemic savaging global economy, says survey

HONG KONG: Evidence of the devastation wreaked on the global economy by the coronavirus pandemic mounted yesterday as activity surveys for March from Australia and Japan showed record falls, with surveys in Europe and the United States expected to be just as dire.



WASHINGTON: A mannequin is seen in the front of a closed store in the normally busy shopping district of Georgetown in Washington, DC on Monday. — AFP

After an initial outbreak in China brought the world's second largest economy to a virtual halt last month, an ever growing number of countries and territories have reported a spike in infections and deaths in March. Entire regions have been placed on lockdown and in some places soldiers are patrolling the streets

to keep consumers and workers indoors, halting services and production and breaking down global supply chains.

Mirroring the emptying of supermarket shelves around the world, indebted corporates have rushed into money markets to hoard dollars, with a global shortage of greenback funding threatening to cripple firms from airlines to retailers.

"The coronavirus outbreak represents a major external shock to the macro outlook, akin to a large-scale natural disaster," analysts at BlackRock Investment Institute said in a note. Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) surveys from Japan showed the services sector shrinking at its fastest pace on record this month and factory activity contracting at its quickest in a decade.

Services PMI slumped to a seasonally adjusted 32.7 from February's 46.8 and manufacturing PMI fell to 44.8 from a final 47.8 last month. The 50 mark separates growth from contraction. The survey results were consistent with a 4 percent contraction in the economy in 2020, Capital Economics senior economist Marcel Theilant said. The likely postponement of the Tokyo Olympics is expected to deal a heavy blow to the world's third largest economy.

In Australia, the CBA Services PMI fell to a record low of 39.8 as restaurants, cafes and tourism were hit hard by travel bans and cancellations of events and concerts.

A separate analysis of card spending data by Commonwealth Bank of Australia showed shopping outside of grocery, alcohol and healthcare was bleak. A weekly consumer confidence gauge by ANZ-Roy Morgan plunged to 30-year lows at 72.2 points. The eurozone composite PMI is expected to come in at 38.8, the lowest since early 2009. US manufacturing and services PMIs are also expected at multi-year lows of 42.8 and 42.0, respectively.—Reuters

matter said. Brazil's Embraer SA, the world's third-largest aircraft maker, said on Sunday it would furlough all non-essential workers in Brazil where it makes regional jets, and further measures could be announced later this week.

Joining the list of temporary shutdowns is Bombardier, which is suspending Canadian production of business jets, according to a source familiar with the matter.

Airbus had called for strong government support for airlines and suppliers but stopped short of calling for direct aid for the company, which has secured an extra 15 billion euros (\$16.14 billion) of commercial credit lines.

The European planemaker has, however, told officials privately that it may need European government help if the crisis lasts for several months, Reuters reported last week.—Reuters

Thailand monks make virus masks from recycled plastic

SAMUT PRAKAN: A Buddhist monk scrawls a prayer on an orange face mask beseeching "an end to the suffering" caused by the deadly coronavirus - a finishing touch to the facial covering weaved out of recycled plastic at one Thai temple. The country has one of the highest numbers of confirmed cases in Southeast Asia, and over the weekend infections doubled to 721 in a pandemic that has killed more than 15,000 globally. As borders close and public spaces shut down, a group of innovative monks near Bangkok are turning to their Buddhist faith in a bid to help contain the disease.

Chak Daeng temple is famous for a campaign led by its environmentally conscious abbot to produce robes from the 15 tons of plastic bottles it receives every month. Monks and volunteers weave synthetic fibres - extracted from the plastic - with cotton into piles of saffron-colored cloth. But Abbot Pranom Dhammalangkaro last month started pivoting some of the production to making face masks in a bid to protect people. An extra filter layer is sewn on the inner lining which he tells AFP will shield users from potential spray droplets.

For additional peace of mind, Wat Chak Daeng's "talisman master" can also write on the mask a Buddhist prayer, suggesting that "to know the problem is to find a way to end the suffering". Many Buddhists believe finding the source of one's troubles sets one on a path towards enlightenment, but Abbot Pranom admits the prayer will not work for everyone. "For those who don't believe in this kind of thing, it won't make any difference."

After bouts of panic buying in the capital over the weekend, he also made a plea for Thais to abide by Buddha's teachings and remain "conscientious" to get through the crisis. In neighboring Myanmar - whose zero case claim is being treated with increasing skepticism - Buddhist monks have also been praying hard to try to protect their nation. One group even took to the skies over the weekend to sprinkle "holy water" from hot air balloons over the country's cherished temple-strewn landscape of Bagan. — AFP



SAMUT PRAKAN: Buddhist monk Chamnanwej Sutthiyano inscribes spiritual incantations on masks made from recycled plastic bottles, amid concerns over the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus, at Wat Chak Daeng Buddhist temple in Samut Prakan. — AFP

Scientists studying genes to fast-track coronavirus vaccine

SINGAPORE: Scientists in Singapore say they have developed a way to track genetic changes that speeds testing of vaccines against a coronavirus that has killed more than 16,000 people worldwide. The scientists, at the city-state's Duke-NUS Medical School, say their technique needs just days to evaluate potential vaccines provided by Arcturus Therapeutics, an American biotech firm the school has partnered with for the trials.

That timeframe compares with the months usually required for testing based on human responses. "You can know from the way the genes change - what genes are turned on, what are turned off," said Ooi Eng Eong, deputy director of the school's emerging infectious diseases program. Swift assessment of such changes triggered by a vaccine allows the scientists to determine its effectiveness and side effects, instead of relying solely on responses from humans who receive it, he added.

Currently, there are no approved medicines or preventive vaccines targeting the virus, with most patients receiving only supportive care, such as help with their breathing. Experts have said getting a vaccine ready could take a year or more. Ooi said he planned to start testing vaccines in mice in about a week, with human trials expected in the second half of the year. — Reuters

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Syrian artist Aziz Al-Asmar and children flash the victory gesture as they pose next to a freshly-drawn graffiti of a cartoon depiction of the SARS-CoV-2 virion, the agent responsible for the COVID-19 coronavirus disease, with text in Arabic above reading "the Corona that you dislike sickens you" and "take it seriously" in English, drawn on the wall of a building in Binnish in Syria's northwestern Idlib province on Monday.—AFP

French fashion houses to produce coronavirus masks

French design houses Yves Saint Laurent and Balenciaga will shift their attentions from high fashion to producing surgical face masks to aid the global coronavirus assault, their parent company Kering said. "The French workshops of Kering's houses Balenciaga and Yves Saint Laurent are preparing to manufacture masks while complying with the strictest health protection measures for their staff members," Kering said in a statement posted on its website. Production will get underway "as soon as the manufacturing process and materials have been approved by the relevant authorities," it said.

Kering also said it would purchase

three million masks from China and import them for the French health services. Another Kering company, Gucci, has committed to donating 1.1 million masks and 55,000 protective medical gowns to aid Italy's fight against the coronavirus, the statement said. Kering recently said it expected to lose several hundred million euros in the first quarter of 2020 because of the global pandemic, with hundreds of millions of people worldwide in home confinement. Its French rival LVMH has for its part launched into the production of sanitizing hand gel for hospitals at three perfume and cosmetics factories in France.—AFP

UK fast food chain to convert shops to minimarkets

UK healthy food chain Leon said Monday it will convert its outlets into mini-supermarkets and offer online groceries as restaurants are forced to close in Britain to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. Leon, which has 65 UK locations, said in a statement that its new e-commerce website will sell consumers food direct to their homes — just like the nation's supermarkets. The website, which launches today, will sell restaurant-quality ready meals, sauces, meats and other food that customers can store and eat at home, it added in a statement.

"Right now you have struggling restaurants and their staff ready to provide food to customers on the one hand, and on the other, supermarkets with

empty shelves," said Leon founder and CEO John Vincent in Monday's statement. "The balance isn't right. Not for customers, not for people facing job losses and not for businesses." Government restrictions that seek to prevent COVID-19 spreading further in Britain are forcing restaurants to stop serving food at their premises. US fast food chain McDonald's has decided to shut all its UK and Ireland restaurants with effect from Monday night. Food and drink chains Nando's, Costa Coffee and Subway also announced that they will close all their outlets as a result of the coronavirus outbreak.—AFP

Saget jokes he's turning into his 'Full House' character amid the coronavirus pandemic

Bob Saget thinks the coronavirus pandemic is turning him into his 'Full House' character. The 63-year-old actor - who portrayed Danny Tanner on the show - is spending more time at home because of the highly-contagious disease and has been using his spare time to clean the property from top to bottom. He joked on Twitter: "Oh. My. God. I spend my day cleaning and vacuuming and sanitizing everything in the house. I have become Danny Tanner." Candace Cameron Bure, who played Bob's on-screen daughter D.J. Tanner-Fuller, poked fun at the actor for "embracing" his alter ego.

She replied: "You spent years getting away from him and now you've finally embraced him. Welcome home dad." Bob replied: "I never wanted to get away from him. I just had other sides that were confused as you well know." And the 'Fuller House' star insisted Danny was an essential figure during such difficult times. He added: "I love the guy - and he loves DJ and all his girls. Ha. We need him more than ever right now. Who knew?" Last November, Bob paid tribute to his co-stars John Stamos and Dave Coulier after filming on spin-off 'Fuller House' drew to a close on the fifth and final season.

He shared a photo of the three of them together and wrote: "Last night, standing in the stage door with my brothers for life— John and Dave —after filming the last episode of the 5th and final season of 'Fuller House'. So much love for everyone involved with this show." And John praised fans for keeping the show "alive" with the success of the spin-off. He wrote: "The end of an era...again. Last night was final taping of @FullerHouse. When every single network and streamer said no to a Full House re-boot, (and I mean ALL of them) @netflix said yes! And they were kind enough to let us play for five seasons!—Bangshowbiz



Bob Saget

Doherty pleads with people to practice social distancing

Shannen Doherty has slammed those who are not social distancing during the coronavirus pandemic. The 48-year-old actress was diagnosed with stage IV breast cancer in February, three years after going into remission, and she is furious that some people aren't sticking to the guidelines to remain two meters apart from people in public spaces, especially for those who are classed as vulnerable with underlying health conditions like herself. Alongside a picture of herself holding up a piece of paper, which has "I am staying at home (and ranting) for all of us #StayHome" written on it, she wrote on Instagram: "I am staying home (and ranting) for us ALL. For my fellow cancer warriors who fight hard everyday for more time. For my mom. For my family. For my husband. For my mother in law and father in law. For my friends. For my friends kids. For every single one of you."

"For myself with stage 4 cancer, my battle is hard enough. For one of my closest friend of over 28 years who has decided to end her battle with metastatic cancer and is in the hospital for the last time alone. For every doctor and hospital worker. For every person at a grocery store doing their best to help. For every person forced to be on the front lines. I'm doing this for us. Please join me. #stayhome (sic)" The 'Beverly Hills



Shannen Doherty

90210" is "embracing every day" amid her cancer battle. And although she has days where she is "depressed" or feeling "plain lazy", she manages to "push through" with the help of her close circle of friends. One way she has been spending her time is by hiking and cooking healthy meals with her pals, which she admitted has made her feel "alive". In a tribute to her friends and giving an update on her battle with the disease, Shannen wrote on Instagram: "After a year of dealing with cancer coming back and other stresses, I'm back at it. —Bangshowbiz



A temple worker attaches a name card with a wish of Buddhist followers to a lotus lantern ahead of Buddha's birthday at Jogyesa Temple in Seoul on Monday. The Association of Korea Buddhist Orders said they will postpone the Buddha's birthday celebrations, scheduled to be held on April 30, amid concerns over the COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak.—AFP

Argentina couple defy coronavirus to hold virtual wedding

When Argentine couple Diego Aspitia and Sofia Cuggino got engaged to be married a year ago, they set a date in March, but like countless others across the globe, their wedding fell victim to the coronavirus lockdown. Argentina went into a nationwide lockdown last week and faced with a choice of whether or not to go through with their wedding plans, the couple decided to hold a virtual service, with minister, friends and family all looking on via Instagram and Facebook. "A wedding is one of the most important events in life. It took us a while to get used to the idea that we were not going to have the one we wanted," said Aspitia, 42, a drugstore employee in the central city of Cordoba.

"But we left our dream aside for the common good. We are staying at home, we respect the isolation and we are very happy with that." Having just moved into a new home and using a Wifi signal borrowed from neighbors, the couple linked up on Saturday with their evangelical church minister, and about 400 "guests" for the event. "When everything fell through, we had to keep to the most important thing in mind, which for us was always that others be there as witnesses and to have their blessing," said Cuggino, 32, an agronomy professor at Cordoba University. "That was it. There was no party, there was no food, there was no dress — that was it!" she said.

Party on hold

Their romance "was built through video calls, letters written on paper, hours talking on WhatsApp, Telegram, all the means there were," said Cuggino, who spent much of their relationship studying in Spain. Plans for a wedding party are on hold until the nominal 11-day quarantine period is over. "But as soon as it ends, we'll go to the registry office to have the marriage in person, because in Argentina for your union to be legal it must be validated by the civil registry and a judge," said Cuggino.

"The party is pending, because we want to hug and dance and laugh and look each other in the eye and drink with our guests." Argentina has nearly 300 coronavirus infections, with four deaths. Though most coronavirus cases are concentrated in Buenos Aires, the couple's home city of Cordoba is also a significant hotspot.—AFP

Woody Allen memoir released by new publisher after protests

Woody Allen's controversial autobiography was released in the United States Monday, swiftly finding a new home after its original publisher pulled out after protests over abuse allegations against the filmmaker. New York-based Arcade Publishing announced it has acquired world rights to "Apropos of Nothing," saying it would not "bow to the politically correct pressures of the modern world." "We as publishers prefer to give voice to a respected writer and filmmaker," editor Jeannette Seaver said in a statement to AFP.

Earlier this month giant publisher Hachette scrapped plans to release the book penned by Allen, 84, who has long been accused of molesting his daughter, and returned all rights to the author. Hachette had canceled the launch after Allen's son Ronan Farrow, who is extremely critical of his father, denounced the book group, and staff staged a walkout. Allegations that Allen molested his adopted daughter Dylan Farrow when she was seven years old in the early 1990s have dogged the Oscar-winning filmmaker for decades. The director of "Annie Hall" and "Manhattan" was cleared of the charges, first leveled by his then-partner Mia Farrow, and has consistently denied the abuse.

But Dylan, now 34, maintains she was molested. The unexpected announcement of the book's release Monday comes about two weeks ahead of its originally scheduled April 7 launch from Hachette's Grand Central Publishing subsidiary. Ronan Farrow, a high-profile investigative journalist and best-selling author, led the backlash to the book. He has long defended Dylan, who renewed her accusations against Allen in early 2018 in the wake of the #MeToo movement against sexual harassment.

Dozens of Hachette employees in New York walked out in protest at its original plan to publish the memoir. But some had criticized Hachette's withdrawal as censorship, including best-selling author Stephen King. "The Hachette decision to drop the Woody Allen book makes me very uneasy. It's not him; I don't give a damn about Mr. Allen. It's who gets muzzled next that worries me," he said on Twitter. Seaver said that "while we respect Hachette's decision to choose not to publish Woody Allen's book, we choose not to take sides but rather, firmly believe in upholding the right to Freedom of Speech." "We find it critical to hear more than one side of a story and more importantly, not to squelch a writer's right to be heard," she said.—AFP



In this file photo US director Woody Allen looks on within a press conference for the presentation of his stage production of Giacomo Puccini's one-act opera "Gianni Schicchi", at the Scala Opera House in Milan.—AFP

Lifestyle | Features



People picnic under the cherry blossoms at Yoyogi park in Tokyo.



A mother and her baby are pictured under cherry blossoms at Yoyogi park in Tokyo.—AFP photos

'JOY OF SPRING': JAPAN FETES CHERRY BLOSSOMS DESPITE VIRUS

The crowds might be thinner and parties smaller, but warnings from officials over the coronavirus have done little to stop Japanese celebrating as the country's famed cherry trees explode into bloom. Over a warm long weekend in Tokyo, people packed into traditional blossom hotspots, many not even wearing face masks, to admire the fluffy white and pink flowers hanging from delicate stems. Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike admitted that taking cherry blossom

were roped off, with signs saying "no party zones" posted to discourage picnickers. "There are more people than I thought," Fujisawa added. At another popular spot, the Chidorigafuchi park and walking path, a sign warned that while "awesome cherry blossoms will cause thousands of people to gather here... please refrain from enjoying eating and drinking." Nearby, a group of women sat picnicking, none of them wearing masks.

picnicking with friends despite the warnings. "We are told to exercise self-restraint but I wanted to have one party at least," Tanaka said, describing hanami — flower viewing — as "the real joy of spring". But he said he had taken some heed of the official advice. "Usually we have hanami parties every weekend during the flower season, but this year we do this only once, only today."

The cherry blossom season is one of Japan's most important national events, with weather forecasters competing every year to offer the most accurate predictions on the first blossoms in major cities. It is also usually big business, with tourists planning holidays to catch the fleeting season and restaurants offering delicacies inspired by the flowers. But the virus has changed that, with more than 1,000 known infections and 41 deaths so far. Many schools are closed and offices have asked staff to work from home. Researchers at Kansai University expect the outbreak to slash business earnings during the blossom season by nearly 40 percent.

'Good to be outside'

In South Korea, which has recorded nearly 9,000 infections and more than 100 deaths from the virus, officials responsible for the country's biggest blossom event said Monday they would put up barriers to block access. "Since we can't completely stop spring-time picnickers from coming... we are closing all key cherry blossom spots which will have the same effect as preventing tourists," said Huh Sung-moo, the mayor of Changwon city, which includes the blossom hotspot Jinhae.

In Japan, the government is moving to lift some restrictions, including allowing schools in parts of the country to reopen. Kanon Sagara, a 17-year-old high school student who has been stuck at home during the closures, said taking in the blossoms at Ueno was a chance to finally get some fresh air. "It feels good to be outside. It feels nice."—AFP

'One party at least'

Loudspeakers in Ueno Park blared messages warning against gatherings, and there was little sign of the massive company parties that are popular during the season. But there were plenty of small groups and couples sitting close to each other on mats drinking and eating under the cherry trees. Yuichiro Tanaka, a vegetable wholesaler, was

parties away from Japanese was like "taking hugs away from Italians", but urged people to avoid gathering in large groups to drink and snack under the trees.

"I come here every year. I feel bad if I miss it," Etsuo Fujisawa, a 57-year-old dental technician told AFP as he walked through the city's Ueno Park where 800 cherry trees are in full bloom. The sides of the main street



People wearing face masks, amid concerns of the COVID-19 coronavirus, walk under the cherry blossoms.



Foreign tourists wearing traditional Japanese kimonos pose under the cherry blossoms.



A child reaches up to touch the cherry blossoms at Ueno park in Tokyo.

Saint Corona name vexes Austrian tourist village

The Austrian village of Sankt Corona am Wechsel may need to rethink its tourism campaign, its mayor said Monday after the new coronavirus pandemic has drawn some unwanted attention. "At first we smiled to see a virus named like the village appear, but jokes have stopped since the epidemic became so serious," said mayor Michael Gruber. Ecotourism is the main source of revenue for the village of some 400

people lying some 100 kilometers (60 miles) south of Vienna at the foot of the Alps. "We'll probably have to find a new name for... our mascot to welcome tourists," Gruber told AFP.

The mascot, named "Corona", is an ant sporting traditional garb, featured on pamphlets and other information for tourists. Attractions in the village named after the Catholic saint Corona include summer

sledding and mountain biking. Austria has recorded more than 3,900 cases of the new coronavirus so far, with 21 deaths. The country of some nine million people has passed strict measures to limit movements to fight the spread of the virus.—AFP

Beyond burgers: Asia puts twist on alternative meats

From lab-grown "seafood" to dumplings made with tropical fruit instead of meat, rising demand for sustainable meat alternatives in Asia is spawning creative products to appeal to local palates. Meat and seafood consumption in Asia is projected to soar, fuelled by growing middle classes in booming economies, but green groups warn of the environmental damage such a trend could bring. Demand for plant-based meat alternatives is still nascent in Asia, but is nevertheless rising by about 30 percent annually and is particularly strong in developed markets such as South Korea, Hong Kong and Singapore, industry players say.

"We do see that there is a growing environmental consciousness among consumers around the world — and that's not different in Asia," said Andre Menezes of Country Foods, which distributes products made by US alternative meat outfit Impossible Foods in Singapore. Meat consumption is an environmental threat as cattle produce methane, a potent greenhouse gas, while logging forests, which take carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere, to make way for animals destroys natural barriers to climate change, environmentalists warn. Eating seafood meanwhile can deplete already under-pressure fish stocks.



This photo shows Karana chef-in-residence Sowmiya Venkatesan displaying fake plant-based "meat" and chive dumplings made from jackfruit in Singapore.



This photo shows microalgae samples being fermented in a research laboratory in Singapore.

US alternative meat titans have already seen the opportunity in Asia, with Impossible Foods seeking to establish a presence in China and rival Beyond Meat, which makes plant-based burgers, planning to open a production facility in the region. But they face competition from local startups, who are thinking beyond simply making faux burgers, and may be better in tune with what consumers want in a diverse region that is fiercely proud of its culinary traditions. They are planning products ranging from Chinese-style steamed dumplings filled with fake meat made from jackfruit — a yellow, chewy tropical fruit — to imitation crab and fish balls, a processed seafood snack popular across Asia.

Fruity, not meaty

Startup Karana is behind the jackfruit dumplings, which it plans to launch this year, and is also developing buns filled with imitation barbecue meat to mimic a mainstay of "dim sum" restaurants — where customers choose from an array of small dishes. Company co-founder Blair Crichton hopes to create familiar products that can win over meat eaters. "We're not necessarily going to be promoting that it's jackfruit... it's about packaging it in a way that is familiar to consumers," he told AFP.

Singapore-based startup Sophie's BioNutrients is working with scientists at a local university to grow microalgae in nutrient-rich soybean residue, a waste product from the food processing industry. They plan to convert the algae to protein powder, which will then be used to make imitation seafood products, such as fish balls and crab. The process does not deplete seafood stocks or cause environmental damage, which traditional fishing can. The company's founder Eugene Wang said people in many Asian countries saw food as their best tradition — and that simply trying to sell them plant-based patties would not cut it.

"If you want to market to these people, you want to sell it in a burger format? No way," said Wang, whose company received Sg\$1.0 million (US\$700,000) funding from the city-state's sovereign wealth fund Temasek. Wang also founded Sophie's Kitchen, a US company selling plant-based crab cakes and shrimp in North America, Britain and Australia, but he is planning a range for Asian palates under the new company, which is independently operated.—AFP



This photo shows fake plant-based "meat" and chive dumplings made from jackfruit in Singapore. — AFP photos

Hand-washing: Luxury Yemenis cannot afford

AL HAJJAH, Yemen: Hand-washing to combat the spread of coronavirus is the order of the day, but it's an unaffordable luxury for millions in war-ravaged Yemen where clean water is dangerously scarce. Yemen's broken healthcare system has yet to register any cases of the disease, but if the pandemic does hit, the impact will be unimaginable in a country where the long conflict has created what the UN calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

Five years after a Saudi-led military coalition intervened in Yemen to support the government against the Iran-backed Houthi rebels, some 80 percent of the population of 30 million is in need of aid. Doctors Without Borders (MSF) said it was concerned many Yemenis have no access even to clean water or soap. "We are extremely worried," Caroline Seguin, MSF's head of programmes in Yemen, Iraq and Jordan, told AFP. "We can recommend they wash their hands, but what if they don't have anything to wash with?"

Nearly 18 million people, including 9.2 million children, do not have regular access to safe water, according to UNICEF, and only a third of the population has access to piped supplies. Eleven-year-old Mohammed's family, who live in the rebel-controlled Hajja province north of the capital Sanaa, are among those for whom water does not come out of a tap. He and his sister leave their home on the back of a donkey every morning to fill up containers from a murky well about three kilometers from their home.

"I get the donkey ready... and then head out at 7:30am, and I keep going back and forth until 10am," Mohammed told AFP. The two children wait for their turn to fill up plastic canisters with a dirty hose. Their family has no choice but to

drink the contaminated water and use it for cooking. Yemen suffered one of its worst ever outbreaks of cholera in 2017 and Oxfam said Tuesday that the forthcoming rainy season could see another deadly episode that would be compounded by the new virus threat.

"Flights into and out of the country have been stopped, restricting movement for some aid workers responding to the humanitarian crisis," it said in a statement. Only half the health centres in the country are functioning, and even those that are open face severe shortages of medicines, equipment and staff, it said. "After five years of death, disease and displacement and in the face of a rising threat from a global pandemic, Yemenis desperately need all warring parties to agree to an immediate countrywide ceasefire," Oxfam's country director Muhsin Siddiquey said in a statement.

Tens of thousands of people - most of them civilians - have been killed since March 2015 when the Saudi-led coalition intervened in the war that has pushed the country to the brink of famine. The conflict, which shows no signs of abating, has crippled the country's healthcare system and paved the way for the spread of diseases. Mohammed Aqil, a doctor at Al-Jaada medical centre in Hajja, said the clinic deals with around 300 patients a day. "Most of the cases are linked to diseases transmitted by consuming water that is not safe for drinking," he told AFP.

MSF said that given the state of the healthcare system, it would be "a disaster" if the new coronavirus reached Yemen, long the Arabian Peninsula's poorest nation. "Frequently washing hands is the most effective way to protect against the coronavirus, but what will more than half the Yemeni people who don't have access to safe



SANAA: A government worker fumigates a neighborhood in the Yemeni capital on Monday— AFP

water do," the International Committee of the Red Cross in Yemen tweeted on Sunday. More than 16,000 deaths have been recorded worldwide

since the virus first emerged in December, according to an AFP tally, most of them in Europe. In Sanaa, the Iran-backed Houthi insurgents who

control the capital and large parts of the north have suspended schools and flights as cases of the virus in nearby countries soar. — AFP

Turks fight coronavirus with cologne

ISTANBUL: In Turkey, sprinkling hands with cologne has long been a ritual for a visit to the barber, a meal at a restaurant or even a trip on the bus. It is seen as a symbol of hospitality, as well as an aid to hygiene, in a country that sets great store by both. Now Turkish cologne - found in almost every household, either in the fridge or a closet - is seeing unprecedented demand as a weapon in the fight against the novel coronavirus.

Many Turks believe cologne, which has a high alcohol content, is effective in keeping hands and faces clean and thus warding off the risk of COVID-19. Long queues could be seen outside cologne shops in Istanbul's busy spice market, in the historic Eminonu district, in early March before Turkey announced its first confirmed case. Now shops and pharmacies have put up signs reading "cologne sold out".

People are commonly seen sprinkling cologne into their hands in the middle of the street, while taxi drivers offer doses to their clients. An association in the northwestern city of Izmit is delivering free cologne as well as bread to the elderly, local media reported. Eyup Sabri Tuncer, a leading traditional cologne maker, said it has received tens of thousands of orders in recent weeks. "In order for a healthy delivery to the customers... we have temporarily suspended further online orders," company official Atilla Ariman told AFP.

Bottles of cologne have flown off the shelves since Health Minister Fahrettin Koca urged Turks to use the liquid as an alternative hand sanitiser against the virus. One user, Ilyas Gocdu, said he is using cologne three times more than before. "I believe it is more effective against germs as it contains alcohol," he said. Demand is so great that a black market has developed for both cologne and other hand sanitisers, with Istanbul police raiding a manufacturing plant last



ISTANBUL: A man pours cologne into another person's hands in Sultanahmet Square on March 21, 2020. — AFP

week to confiscate products made "unhealthily".

Announcing his government's economic stimulus package last week, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said face masks as well as cologne would be handed out free to people aged 65 and over. Turkey has so far recorded 37 coronavirus-related deaths and 1,529 cases.

Is the belief that cologne is effective against coronavirus grounded in science? Professor Bulent Ertugrul, board member of the Turkish Society of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases, said alcohol can destroy the outer membrane of the coronavirus. "As alcohol is a good solvent, it destroys this lipid envelope," he told AFP. Ertugrul said the best protection against the new coronavirus is washing one's hands after contact with the environment.

But he added: "If soap and water are not available, using a hand sanitizer that is at least 60 percent alcohol can help." Cologne fits the bill, he said. "As we know, cologne contains at least 70 percent alcohol," he said. "That's why it is a good hand sanitizer against COVID-19." — AFP

in a statement posted on its website. The security services tolerate no breach of the rules of the partial nationwide curfew, it stressed.

Egyptian Ambassador to Kuwait Tareq Al-Qouni said that upon coordination between EgyptAir and the Kuwaiti authorities, six flights will operate from Kuwait to Cairo from today until March 30 to fly out Egyptians who had applied to the Egyptian consulate beforehand, including visit visa holders, those who had annulled residency visas pending departure and urgent humanitarian cases.

Qouni urged Egyptians who are contacted by the consulate to check with the nearest Egypt Air travel agent to issue their tickets. Meanwhile, the Directorate General for Civil Aviation announced that based on a request from the Egyptian consulate in Kuwait, a daily EgyptAir flight will depart from Kuwait International Airport to Cairo International Airport at 4 pm from March 25 to 30.

Kuwait confirmed two new coronavirus cases during the past 24 hours. Health Ministry Spokesperson Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said that the two cases are of Filipino and Indian residents who were in contact with patients that arrived from the UK, bringing the number of infections in the country to 191 cases. Sanad revealed that out of the 191 cases, 39 of them have recovered and 152 are still receiving treatment. He indicated five cases are in the ICU, while 708 individuals have completed the quarantine period. — Agencies

Indian police clear anti-govt...

Continued from Page 1

Delhi is under a lockdown until the end of the month to halt the spread of the virus and public gatherings of more than five people have been banned.

The Citizenship Amendment Act, which eases the path for non-Muslims from neighboring Muslim-majority countries to gain citizenship, triggered weeks of sometimes violent protests against Modi's government after it was passed in December.

At least 78 people have been killed in demon-

strations triggered by the law across the country, a large number of them in another part of Delhi in clashes between Hindus and Muslims. Critics say the law discriminates against Muslims and it has deepened concern that Modi's administration is undermining India's secular traditions. Modi's ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party denies any bias against India's 180 million Muslims.

Even before the coronavirus epidemic, the protest at Shaheen Bagh had become a thorn in the government's side, and there had been calls by hardline Hindu groups linked to Modi's alliance and residents in the area to clear it out. India has reported 471 cases of the coronavirus but health experts have warned that a big jump is imminent, which would likely overwhelm the underfunded and crumbling public health infrastructure. — Reuters

Gulf residents call for end to...

Continued from Page 1

The UAE's Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) declined to comment on VoIP availability. State-controlled Etisalat and DU directed Reuters questions to the TRA. Virgin Mobile, part of Du, did not respond to comment requests, but told one customer complaining about VoIP restrictions on Twitter it was "working" on the issue.

Oman, while still blocking WhatsApp - owned by Facebook Inc - said Skype for Business, Google Meet, Zoom and WebEx were now useable. Its Telecommunications Regulatory Authority said the move was to help business continuity and communication. In Qatar, where VoIP applications must also be authorized, a Vodafone Qatar customer helpline said WhatsApp and Skype are restricted, but Zoom and WebEx are available on mobile data.

Arab kids told 'turn on TV' for...

Continued from Page 1

middle and secondary schoolchildren. "It's as if the pupil was in class with his colleagues and teacher," said Education Minister Mohamad Amari Zayed. Mahdi al-Naami, a secondary school teacher in the Hay al-Andalous district of Tripoli, said: "Children must study at home and it's the responsibility of the parents to make sure they do so." As bank employee Salima Abdel Aziz pointed out, that particular responsibility falls mainly on mothers.

In Jordan, where a 24-hour curfew has now been enforced on pain of immediate arrest, a sports channel has refashioned itself into an educational broadcaster. Schools in the kingdom are also using the popular WhatsApp multi-platform Internet service to send out and receive homework and then return it marked with corrections. According to 2018 figures, some 9.1 million of the kingdom's 9.5 million people has Internet access. But "this system will never be the same as lessons in school where pupils can ask questions and interact with their teachers," said Saif Hindawi, a 40-year-old father of four girls.

Haneen Farouq, a college professor in Baghdad,

said the authorities had instructed teachers to turn to electronic media after schools were closed as part of measures to curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Her private college has opted for the schoolwork app Google Classroom for its remote learning during the coronavirus lockdown. "Lessons are sent out each day in PDF format," she said. But she acknowledged after months of anti-government protests since October, that the virus was a further blow to her students. "They're not motivated at all," she said, ruefully admitting that "there's a high chance we'll just have to redo everything when schools and colleges reopen anyway".

In the West Bank, now under lockdown by the Palestinian authorities, teachers in government schools are using the Zoom app to teach up to 100 students at once, with many using mobile phones. But such interrupted schooling could have lingering effects. According to a report from the UN children's agency UNICEF earlier this year - before the virus fully emerged - some 63 percent of children across the Middle East already could not read or understand a simple text by the age of 10.

The education ministry in Morocco, which has some eight million schoolchildren, this week started to operate a digital platform for lessons on the television and Internet. Television, however, "remains the main tool of remote learning for families which don't have computers even if they have internet access," said a teacher at a rural school near the southern city of Marrakesh. — AFP

Amir praises joint efforts to fight...

Continued from Page 1

"To the Minister of Health, with all of his orders, which comes in the interest of citizens' health and security, I thank him for his exerted efforts," he said, adding that "not one negative comment came during his work, which is a testament of acceptance by the Kuwaiti people to his work during this crisis."

The ministry of education said Monday that resident teachers and ministry staff can travel back to their respective countries without needing a leave permit. According to the ministry's Twitter account, the decision was made in coordination with the ministry of interior. Regarding resident teachers and staff whose residency visas will expire while abroad, the ministry said efforts will be coordinated with Kuwaiti diplomatic missions to allow them to travel back to Kuwait.

The interior ministry said that nine expatriates were arrested in Farwaniya on Monday evening for violating the partial curfew. The detainees were referred to the deportation department to complete the procedures of their deportation, the ministry's public relations and security media department said

Classifieds

Wednesday, March 25, 2020

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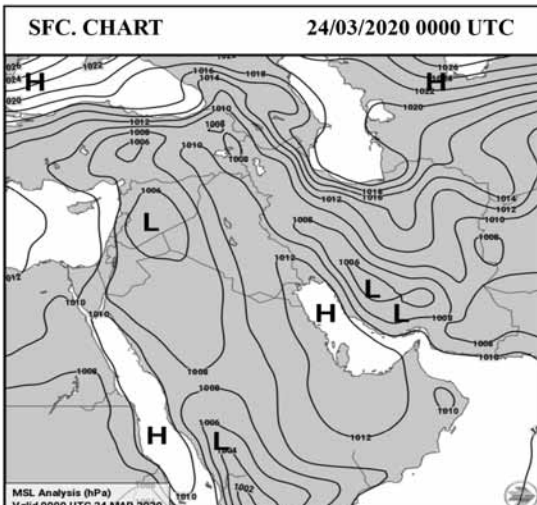
Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Warm and Clouds will increase with light variable wind to light to moderate south easterly wind, with speed of 08 - 28 km/h.

BY NIGHT: Rather cold and Partly cloudy with light to moderate north westerly wind to light variable wind, with speed of 06 - 26 km/h.

WEATHER WARNING: No Current Warnings

STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.
KUWAIT CITY	26 °C	16 °C
KUWAIT AIRPORT	26 °C	12 °C
ABDALY	26 °C	10 °C
BUBYAN	- °C	- °C
JAHRA	27 °C	15 °C
FAILAKA ISLAND	25 °C	14 °C
SALMIYAH	25 °C	17 °C
AHMADI	24 °C	17 °C
NUWAISIB	24 °C	14 °C
WAFRA	27 °C	11 °C
SALMY	24 °C	11 °C



DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Wednesday	03/25	Warm and Partly cloudy	26 °C	13 °C	VRB-SE	08 - 35 km/h
Thursday	03/26	Warm and Partly cloudy to cloudy with a chance for scattered rain	27 °C	15 °C	SE	15 - 45 km/h
Friday	03/27	Warm and Partly cloudy causing rising dust over open areas with a chance for rain that might be	28 °C	16 °C	SE	20 - 50 km/h
Saturday	03/28	Warm and Cloudy to partly cloudy causing rising dust over open areas with a chance for rain that	24 °C	17 °C	SE	25 - 60 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	04:27
Sunrise	05:47
Zuhr	11:54
Asr	15:23
Sunset	18:01
Isha	19:19

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	24 °C
MIN. Temp.	13 °C
MAX. RH	74 %
MIN. RH	30 %
MAX. Wind	N 43 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

Hospitals

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

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EMERGENCY 112

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Airlines	Number
Kuwait Airways	171
Jazeera Airways	177
Turkish Airlines	1884918
FlyDubai	22414400
Qatar Airways	22423888
KLM	22425747
Royal Jordanian	22418064/5/6
British Airways	22425635
Air France	22430224
Emirates	22921555
Air India	22456700
Air India EXPRESS	22438185/4
Sri Lanka Airlines	22424444
Egypt Air	22421578
Swiss Air	22421516
Saudia	22426306
Middle East Airlines	22423073
Lufthansa	22422493
PIA	22421044
Bangladesh Airlines	22452977/8
Oman Air	22958787
Turkish Airlines	22453820/1

Daily SuDoku

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

medium

Yesterday's Solution

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

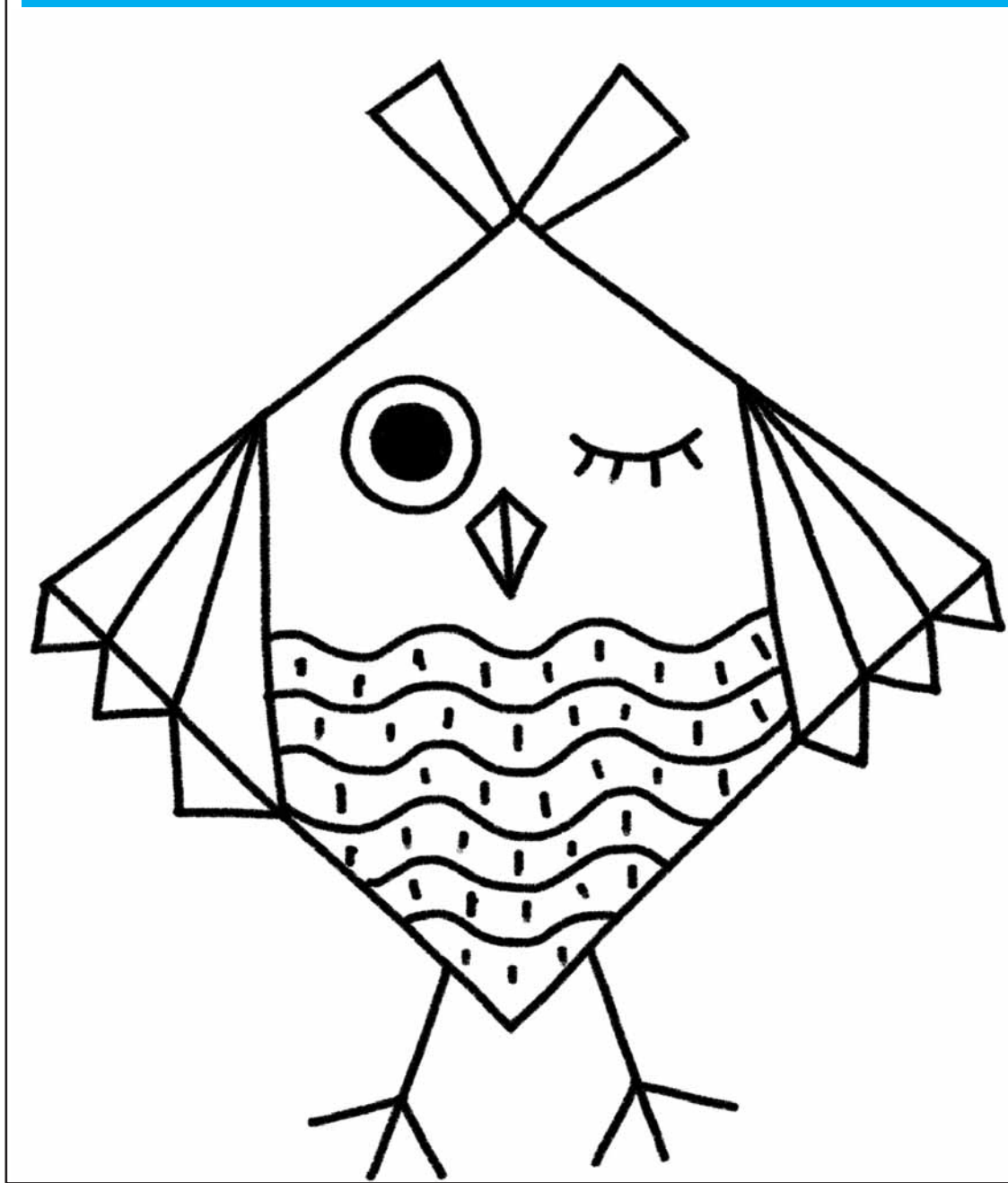
very hard

STAR TRACK

- Aries (March 21-April 19)**
Study of intellectual or spiritual subjects that particularly interest you could keep you at home for much of the day, Aries. More than one visitor might drop by in order to discuss these matters, perhaps bringing a few books. Discussions could take on an imaginative, idealistic, and even mystical level, which could prove inspiring for all involved. Take notes, because you'll want to be sure and remember these conversations.
- Taurus (April 20-May 20)**
Intuition enhances communications of all kinds today, Taurus. If you've been thinking about doing some writing, this is the day to get started. Your mind is particularly expansive, and your imagination is working at a very high level. Insights that might not normally come to you add new depth and dimension to your writing, whether a poem, novel, article, or letter to a friend. Make the most of it!
- Gemini (May 21-June 20)**
Imagination combines with intellectual abilities to enable you to make some creative changes to your home, Gemini. This could be something minor, such as purchasing plants, or a major project, such as remodeling or redecorating. Whatever you choose to do, you're likely to channel a lot of your energy into it right now in order to produce results that you and the other members of your household can be happy with.
- Cancer (June 21-July 22)**
You could make a trip to the library today, Cancer, as you may need to track down some intellectual, spiritual, or practical information required for a task or project you're working on. You may find yourself spending more time there than you'd originally planned, as you might discover facts or ideas that open up fascinating new trains of thought. If your time is limited, keep track of the hour. If not, have fun!
- Leo (July 23-August 22)**
Your intuition has been steadily increasing over the past few months, Leo, and today it could operate at a particularly high level. More than one premonition may come to you, and you'll probably find yourself picking up more frequently on the thoughts and feelings of others. If you're into the arts, inspiration may come that you should definitely make use of. Don't worry about what's practical.
- Virgo (August 23-September 22)**
Assessment of others' ideas may be a main focus today, Virgo. Group activities could require your intellectual input. A friend could come to you with an idea for a project of some kind. Writing or speaking may be involved in some way. Your friend isn't in a very practical frame of mind, so don't be surprised if the ideas don't seem very workable right now. Don't be discouraging, however. Your friend may surprise you!

- Libra (September 23-October 22)**
Professional interests are definitely served by your intuition and fertile imagination today, Libra. Writing, speaking, or the dramatic arts could be involved. If your career involves communication in any form, expect to capture the interest of a lot of people now. Positive career changes are in the wind, although they may not be apparent to you just yet. This isn't the time to worry about the future. For now, let your imagination guide you.
- Scorpio (October 23-November 21)**
Your mind is probably taking a mystical turn, Scorpio. This is a great day to study spiritual or metaphysical concepts or expand your knowledge of fields like astrology, numerology, or the other occult sciences. Books and lectures may come to your attention, and discussions with friends who share your interests should set your mind going. Don't let today pass you by. Expand your mind.
- Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)**
Dreams or visions could bring sudden and exciting insights with regard to career issues, Sagittarius. These dreams could steer you toward books, websites, and other sources of information that can provide further guidance that could well prove invaluable. The source of your insights may be rather unorthodox, but don't write them off because of that.
- Capricorn (December 22-January 19)**
You're apt to be especially attuned to the thoughts and feelings of partners at this time, Capricorn. In fact, you might find yourself picking up so much that it's a bit overwhelming. Nonetheless, it is an advantage. You'll probably know instinctively what those around you want, and this new sensitivity should definitely score you some points with business and romantic partners alike.
- Aquarius (January 20- February 18)**
Work on projects that require imagination and sensitivity could well take up a lot of your time today, Aquarius. Some in-depth research may be involved. The work might require a lot of energy and concentration, perhaps more than you expected, but you should be more than satisfied with the results in the end. Just make sure to take breaks, and don't forget to eat. You'll need the fuel, after all!
- Pisces (February 19-March 20)**
Words of love, perhaps of a very idealistic nature, could be exchanged today between you and a romantic partner, Pisces. One of you could even write a song or poem for the other. This can be a very healing and transformative experience, and could therefore make both of you feel very good. The only downside is that you could well view each other through rose-colored glasses.

Color It



Sports

Re-organising Olympics a Herculean task: Former IOC marketing head

‘It is mind-bogglingly complex to make sudden change after seven years’

LONDON: Thomas Bach and the IOC should not be criticised for procrastination over the Tokyo Olympics as re-organising them is “mind-bogglingly complex”, the movement’s former head of marketing Michael Payne told AFP.

Payne, who in nearly two decades at the International Olympic Committee was widely credited with transforming its brand and finances through sponsorship, said Monday the IOC could have unilaterally cancelled the Games because of the coronavirus pandemic.

However, Payne believes that was never an option given Bach’s experience as a sportsman of missing out on the 1980 Moscow Olympics due to the boycott by Western nations in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

Payne said behind the scenes the IOC have been moving towards a postponement for a while. “It is mind-bogglingly complex to make a sudden change after seven years of preparation for the biggest sporting event in the world,” he told AFP in a phone interview.

“The IOC have been with increasing urgency looking to fall back on Plan B. The IOC remit allows them legally to cancel the Games unilaterally.”

“Cancelling the Games though is not an option so to postpone the Games, you have to have your delivery partner (Japan) on board.”

Payne said Japan would take its time to decide as until recently the local organisers had been enthusiastic about maintaining the Games in their scheduled slot.

“The Japanese have been holding out in the hope it might still be possible to hold the Games in July,” he said.

“The cost to the Japanese of postponing them is loss of face and political capital to (Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo) Abe as this is very much his project.”

“In the last few days Japan have been very up for them to go ahead but the problem is the rest of the world cannot get there.”

Payne said the Japanese reluctance to contemplate postponement has left Bach with “one arm tied behind his back.”

However, with Australia and Canada now calling for a delay to next year even the option of delaying by a few months looks unlikely.

“The Japanese message is maybe hoping for postponing to later in the year but would this solve uncertainty?” Payne asked.

“The last thing you want is a dark cloud hanging over the Games, as in ‘is it going to happen?’.”

“Various teams now saying they want it postponed till 2021 helps the IOC’s hand with the Japanese and saying ‘October will not work.’”

Payne said Abe would consider a Games in 2021 as an enormous consolation prize given the grave circumstances.

“As difficult as that could be to Abe to postpone to 2021 I believe Japan could host the greatest Games ever,” he said.

“The DNA of the Olympic Games after all is a celebration and humanity coming together.”

“Next year the Japanese can celebrate by saying we have come through this so it would be huge for Abe. “Summer 2021 is the best option — indeed the only option.”

Payne dismissed the theory that US broadcaster



BEIJING: A woman wearing a face mask, amid concerns of the COVID-19 coronavirus, walks before an Olympic rings sculpture at the national ‘Birds Nest’ stadium, the main site of the 2008 Beijing Olympics in Beijing. World Athletics chief Sebastian Coe has called for the Tokyo Olympics to be postponed over the coronavirus pandemic. —AFP

NBC or the main sponsors would dictate the terms of a postponement.

“One of the complete misnomers is all the debate is being directed by NBC and sponsors,” he said. “Nothing could be further from the truth. The IOC does not consult sponsors or NBC before they vote on who gets the Games.”

“The idea the IOC say to sponsors, ‘what works best for you?’ is just not the way it works.”

At the end of it, though, Payne believes Bach will be guided by his own painful experience of being

denied the chance to defend the fencing title he won in 1976 because West Germany withdrew from the Moscow Olympics.

“He is marked by what went on in the 1980s with IOC presidents making the wrong decisions vis a vis boycotts (the Soviet bloc then boycotted the 1984 Los Angeles Games),” said Payne.

“He is mindful of what cancellation of a Games could mean to 6,000 athletes as many just get one shot in their careers. “So he was never going to opt for cancellation.” —AFP

1964 torchbearer frets about virus-hit Olympic relay

YOKOSUKA: Even though it was 56 years ago, Kazuo Goto still vividly remembers his pride as he carried the Olympic flame on the last day of the torch relay when Tokyo hosted the Games in 1964. But with the coronavirus threatening the torch relay and even the Olympic Games themselves, the 73-year-old believes the 2020 version should be scrapped, as torchbearers need to be able to carry the flame with a “clear conscience.”

“We are not in a position where we can go ahead with the torch relay as planned,” Goto, a former insurance broker, told AFP in an interview at his house in Yokosuka, southwest of Tokyo. The white-haired former torchbearer recalled that he was “thrilled” to be part of the 1964 Olympic movement, which symbolised Japan’s rise from the ashes of World War II to an economic and technological powerhouse. And while treasuring his “emotional” memories of the event, he said he was now puzzled with organisers still going ahead with the 2020 Olympic torch relay while the outbreak of the new coronavirus has thrown the entire Tokyo Games into doubt.

Plugging ahead regardless seems to be “egoism” on the part of organisers, he charged. Goto questioned what would happen if the torch relay begins but the Olympics are postponed in the middle of the event — a fairly likely scenario with the International Olympic Committee giving itself four weeks to make a decision.

“Do they let them run and then they say they can’t hold the Olympics?” he asked. “I ran with my head high and chest out under the sunshine, representing my country. That’s the significance,” Goto said, cradling the torch he carried in 1964. “It’s best for torchbearers to run with a crystal-clear conscience.”

‘HOPE LIGHTS OUR WAY’

One prominent torchbearer, US-based Japanese football star Nahomi Kawasumi, has already pulled out of the relay, saying she did not want to risk infecting anyone given the number of cases is much higher in the US than in Japan.

The nationwide torch relay is due to begin on Thursday, starting from the J-Village sports complex in Fukushima that was used as a base for workers during the 2011 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster. But the coronavirus has already played havoc with the relay, forcing organisers to scale back celebrations and warn fans not to congregate in crowds along the route. In what organisers described as a “heartbreaking” decision, they kept away some 200 children from welcoming the torch off the plane from Greece.

Goto said he feels sorry for the 10,000 bearers of the 2020 flame, whose big moment may be dampened by sparse crowds and who may run with mixed feelings. “They are supposed to run with well-wishers. The torch relay is an integral part of the Olympics,” he said.

The theme of the torch relay is “hope lights our way” and former Olympic judo champion Saori Yoshida, who lit a ceremonial cauldron with the flame when it arrived from Greece, said she wanted it to brighten people’s lives in the current dark times. —AFP

When Olympic torch relays go wrong

TOKYO: From a jaguar on the loose to an elaborate hoax involving burning underwear, the Olympic torch relay has had its fair share of mishaps. As Japan downscals the 2020 relay due to concerns over the new coronavirus, AFP looks back at some of the trials and tribulations of the event, first run ahead of the Berlin Olympics in 1936.

FLAMING UNDERPANTS

Probably the most memorable stunt surrounding the torch relay came in 1956 when an Australian student named Barry Larkin fooled crowds with a homemade torch topped by burning underpants.

Larkin managed to get his torch — a wooden chair leg crowned with a metal pudding container holding the fiery underwear — up the stairs of Sydney’s Town Hall and deliver it to city mayor Pat Hills, cheered on by tens of thousands.

The university student even arranged his own fake motorcycle escort but when he started to run out from the crowd, he found himself flanked by genuine police outriders as the crowd closed in around him.

The mayor sensed nothing wrong as he took the flame from Larkin, giving the first part of his prepared remarks before realising something was amiss.

JAGUAR ON THE RUN

A 17-year-old jaguar named Juma was lined up for photos as the torch passed through the Amazon in northern Brazil during the relay for the Rio

Olympics in 2016.

But Juma escaped its handlers and four tranquilliser darts fired at the animal failed to slow it down.

After it threatened a vet, soldiers opened fire on the jaguar — in danger of extinction and the symbol of the Amazon — and shot it dead.

FRIED DOVES

The climax of the relay — the lighting of the Olympic cauldron — has provided some unforgettable moments such as Mohammad Ali trembling to light it as he suffered from Parkinson’s disease and an archer firing a flame into it in Barcelona.

But things have not always gone smoothly. The most grisly blunder came in Seoul in 1988 when dozens of doves released earlier in the opening ceremony alighted on the cauldron.

When the flame was lit, several of the birds were incinerated to the horror of watching spectators.

Legendary Australian athlete Cathy Freeman was also left hanging at the Sydney opening ceremony when a platform supposed to rise after the lighting of the flame got stuck for around three minutes.

“We’ve got a slight technical hitch. Nothing that can’t be fixed,” said one reassuring voice in her earpiece. “F—, f—, f—, f—,” screamed another.

PROTESTS APLENTY

The torch relay has been the target of several protests, most notably during the run-up to the Beijing Olympics as demonstrators took China to task over its Tibet policy.

Protests started even when the flame was lit in ancient Olympia and dogged the relay throughout its journey to China, notably as it passed through London, Paris and San Francisco.

In Japan, monks at an ancient Buddhist temple pulled out of hosting

athletes’ turn to have their worlds turned upside down.

“To be honest, I’m left reeling and feeling a little lost. But the goal posts haven’t disappeared — just shifted. It’s time to recalibrate and fire up for the next challenge.”

Keesja Gofers, part of the Australian women’s water polo team that had already qualified for Tokyo, said the decision was “devastating” for all athletes competing around the world. “I have ridden not just a rollercoaster but the entire theme park of emotions,” she said on Instagram.

“I am relieved. Athletes around the world will now have the chance at a proper preparation and the Olympics can, on whatever date they are held, continue to be a coming together of the world’s best at their best.” The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has said it will make a decision on the Tokyo Games within four weeks but IOC member Dick Pound told Reuters on Monday the global body had already decided to postpone the Games. —Reuters



RIO DE JANEIRO: File photo shows an Olympic torchbearer running through the city centre as the Olympic flame is paraded through Rio de Janeiro ahead of the Rio 2016 Olympic Games. As Japan downscals the 2020 torch relay due to concerns over the new coronavirus. —AFP

a torch ceremony because of the Chinese crackdown in Tibet.

The relay ahead of Sydney 2000 also suffered from isolated protests. One spectator wrestled it out of the hands of former world surfing champion Tom Carroll as he travelled along the New South Wales south coast and tried to hurl it into Kiama harbour before being wrestled to the ground. A high-school student also tried to put out the torch with a fire extinguisher.

LIGHTING HICCUPS

Although the Olympic flame is supposed to be eternal, problems with the lighting mechanism have caused it to go out several times.

In 2012, officials had to hastily relight the flame from a stand-by “mother flame” when it vanished from the side of Paralympic badminton star David Foltlett’s wheelchair in blustery weather in southwest England.

USA Gymnastics calls for Olympics to be postponed

LOS ANGELES: USA Gymnastics joined the growing number of sports federations calling for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics to be postponed in the face of the coronavirus pandemic.

In a statement posted on its Twitter account, the federation said it was making the move after a survey found 62 percent of its athletes who responded were in favor of delaying the Games now scheduled for July 24-August 9.

“After considering the responses from athletes who participated in our survey & the 62% who were in favor of delaying the Games, we are adding our voice to the chorus advocating for postponement,” the federation said.

“We are grateful to have our ath-

letes’ insight and input to guide this decision.” USA Swimming and USA Track and Field had already urged the US Olympic and Paralympic Committee to press the International Olympic Committee for a delay.

The USOPC has declined to do so, although on Sunday it welcomed IOC president Thomas Bach’s promise that a decision would be made within four weeks. That’s not soon enough for many. On Sunday, Canada said it would not send a team to Tokyo this summer, urging the IOC to postpone the Games for a year.

World Athletics and a string of other national Olympic committees have also come out in favor of pushing back the Games as athletes struggle to prepare as facilities are closed and health authorities urge people to practice social distancing to slow the spread of the deadly virus.

The US women’s gymnastics team, led by Simone Biles, won a second straight team gold at the 2016 Rio Olympics. —AFP

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The US women’s gymnastics team, led by Simone Biles, won a second straight team gold at the 2016 Rio Olympics. —AFP

Sports

A-League football, Australia's last active sport, pulls plug

Players accept games may have to take place without fans: Barnes

SYDNEY: Australia's last active sport, the A-League soccer, pulled the plug on its season yesterday to curb the spread of coronavirus, with bosses saying it had become "mission impossible". The decision follows the National Rugby League and the country's most popular spectator sport, Aussie Rules, making similar decisions over the past two days.

Rugby union, cricket, basketball and other sports had already shut down. The 11-team A-League, which played to empty stadiums last weekend, only had five rounds left to complete the season. But tightened government restrictions, including state border shutdowns, made it too difficult to continue.

"The decision taken was the result of the increased state and national requirements, in particular border controls that the states, and New Zealand have implemented," said Football Federation Australia chief James Johnson.

"As a national competition that is played in almost all parts of Australia, also in New Zealand, mission complicated became mission impossible." FFA will review the situation over the coming weeks with a further status assessment scheduled for April 22, with the goal being to reschedule the remaining games.

Two A-League teams, Wellington Phoenix and Melbourne Victory, were already serving mandatory 14-day quarantines after playing in New Zealand last week and failing to get back to Australia before tough

new entry rules took effect.

"To get so close to completing the competition, only to pull up a few weeks short, has been heart-breaking for the players, clubs and fans," added Johnson. "That said, the health and safety of our fans, players, volunteers and staff has always been the overriding consideration for us."

Australia has recorded more than 1,800 cases of COVID-19 with seven deaths. Although football is set to take a significant financial hit from the suspension,

Johnson insisted it would survive, in contrast to doom and gloom predictions that rugby league faces a fight for its life.

"The game will survive this, of that I'm absolutely sure," he said. "But will we need to make changes, will things look different, I'd say yes."

Meanwhile, players have accepted that playing games in closed stadiums might be the only way to complete the English domestic league season, Bobby Barnes, deputy chief executive of the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA), has said.

English soccer has been suspended until at least April 30 due to the coronavirus crisis, although the Football Association, Premier League and EFL have agreed to extend the season indefinitely. As the coronavirus pandemic leads to increasing restrictions across the country, Barnes said players were now looking at "realistic" options to finish the 2019-20



SYDNEY: Players from both teams walk past each other in an empty Bankwest Stadium, shuttered from fans due to the COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak, during the round 24 A-League football match between Sydney FC and the Western Sydney Wanderers at Bankwest Stadium in Sydney. — AFP

campaign. "In an ideal world we'd be playing in front of crowds but I think it's more a case of there being no alternative," Barnes told The Athletic. "We're not in an ideal world and the players I've spoken to accept that's what it will have to be."

"Football is about fans. But the reality for the vast majority of the players, particularly at the highest level, is their income is funded by television money

and there are contracts that have to be adhered to."

"In order for us (the PFA) to be able to protect those players in terms of securing their salaries, if that's the only offer we have on the table to complete the season, then that is what it will be."

The flu-like virus has infected more than 337,500 globally and killed over 14,600. Deaths from the virus in Britain jumped 54 to 335 on Monday. — Agencies

US Soccer names sports executive Wilson CEO

LOS ANGELES: The beleaguered US Soccer Federation named longtime sports executive Will Wilson as Chief Executive Officer, taking over from Dan Flynn who retired in September. Wilson, 50, has worked the last eight years as head of the NFL division of Wasserman Media Group, where he served as the agent for his nephew, former Indianapolis Colts quarterback Andrew Luck.

Prior to spearheading the Wasserman agency's NFL operations, Wilson spent four years working for Major League Soccer and its marketing arm Soccer United Marketing, eventually serving as executive vice president of international business and special events for SUM.

Wilson's relationship with MLS commissioner and US federation board member Don Garber goes back further. The two worked for NFL Europe in the 1990s, with Wilson serving as general manager of the league's Scottish Claymores. Wilson also worked as the managing director of NFL Mexico. "We are thrilled Will is joining US Soccer as our CEO," said US Soccer President Cindy Parlow Cone. "He brings an un-



rivalled set of experience and expertise to soccer in America.

"His global perspective, background in marketing and growing sporting events and extensive experience in the sports business will be invaluable in growing soccer at all levels. 'Soccer is the world's game and Will is the perfect person to help us grow it to America's game.'"

Parlow Cone herself only took over the president's office this month, stepping up from vice president after president Carlos Cordeiro resigned amid a furore over what superstar Megan Rapinoe branded "blatant sexism" in the federation's response to a gender discrimination lawsuit by the US women's team.

The lawsuit, in which women's national

team players are seeking \$66 million in back pay under the Equal Pay act and the Civil Rights Act, is set to go to trial on May 5. The United States are also still trying to rebound from the failure of the men's team to qualify for the 2018 World Cup.

"I'm very excited to be joining US Soccer," Wilson said. "I have always admired the federation from afar and have long felt that the US Soccer crest is one of the best brands in the business. 'US Soccer has an amazing fan base and our supporters are waiting for us to get things back on track both on and off the field,' he said. "I'm incredibly energized and excited about the work in front of us to continue striving to become America's preeminent sport." —AFP

Cowboys Pro Bowl Frederick retires

DALLAS: Dallas Cowboys Pro Bowl center Travis Frederick stunningly announced his retirement on Monday. Frederick, who turned 29 last Wednesday, was a Pro Bowl selection in five of his six NFL seasons. Frederick revealed his retirement in a lengthy letter, citing his bout with the autoimmune disease Guillain-Barre syndrome as a factor. He missed the 2018 season due to the illness in which the body's immune system attacks nerves, but he returned to be a standout again last season.

The New England Patriots shed ties with another familiar face, releasing kicker Stephen Gostkowski. Franchise quarterback Tom Brady, who helped the team win six Super Bowl titles, announced last week he was leaving the franchise, and he signed with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers on Friday. Gostkowski, 36, had a role in three of those championships and is franchise's all-time leading scorer (1,775 points). He was entering the final season of his two-year, \$8.5 million contract after missing the majority of the 2019 season due to an ailing left hip.

NFL legend Peyton Manning turned down overtures to be part of ESPN's "Monday Night Football" broadcasting crew, the New York Post reported. The publication cited sources saying Manning wasn't willing to commit to the weekly schedule throughout the NFL season. Manning has declined multiple opportunities to be a game analyst since retiring as a player following the 2015 season.

The New York Giants agreed to a one-

year deal with running back Dion Lewis, according to multiple reports. Lewis, 29, spent the past two seasons with the Tennessee Titans, but he didn't get much work in 2019 due to Derrick Henry's standout campaign. He will now back up another standout runner, Saquon Barkley.

The Los Angeles Rams will feature a new look when they take the field this season. The Rams revealed new team colors and a different logo as part of a rebranding effort that has been in progress since the franchise returned to Los Angeles in 2016 after more than two decades in St. Louis. The Rams are returning to their royal blue and gold colors, as opposed to the navy blue and light gold and white that were prevalent for the team in the past.

Terry Bradshaw is having difficulty connecting the dots behind Brady's decision to leave the Patriots in favor of the Buccaneers. Bradshaw, a Hall of Fame quarterback and long-time NFL analyst for FOX Sports, said in an interview with The Athletic that he feels there's more to the story. Bradshaw contends that there maybe something more to prove for Brady, who will turn 43 in August.

The Kansas City Chiefs agreed to terms with quarterback Jordan Ta'amu, who led the XFL with 12 touchdown passes. Ta'amu's agent told media outlets that the undrafted player turned prolific quarterback of the St. Louis Battlehawks will join the Super Bowl champions.

The New Orleans Saints reportedly came to terms with two players, including the XFL's interceptions leader. Former Houston Roughnecks cornerback Deatrick Nichols is joining the Saints, according to his agent, and defensive end Noah Spence will remain with New Orleans, per multiple media reports.

Linebacker Jordan Jenkins, who recorded a team-best eight sacks in 2019, is

returning to the New York Jets on a one-year, \$5 million deal, multiple outlets reported. Linebacker James Burgess, New York's leading tackler last season, also will be back with the club. He reportedly agreed to a one-year deal.

Robert "Woody" Widenhofer, a former Pittsburgh Steelers defensive coordinator and Vanderbilt and Missouri head coach, died Sunday. He was 77. Anchored by their "Steel Curtain" defense, the Steelers won four Super Bowl championships during Widenhofer's tenure as the linebackers coach (1973-78) and defensive coordinator (1979-83).

The San Francisco 49ers signed linebacker Joe Walker to a one-year deal, NFL Media's Tom Pelissero reported. Walker, 27, registered 65 tackles and one forced fumble in 16 games (11 starts) last season with the Arizona Cardinals.

The Dallas Cowboys are in talks with free agent defensive tackle Dontari Poe, NFL Network's Ian Rapoport reported. The two-time Pro Bowl selection registered four sacks and 22 tackles in 11 games last season with the Carolina Panthers. He had season-ending surgery for a torn quadriceps in November.

Quarterback P.J. Walker, an XFL standout for the Houston Roughnecks, signed with the Panthers. Walker played at Temple for head coach Matt Rhule and spent time with the Indianapolis Colts in 2017 and 2018 as an undrafted free agent. Rhule was hired as head coach of the Panthers in January.

Linebacker Barkevious Mingo signed a one-year deal with the Chicago Bears. The one-year deal for the 29-year-old is worth \$1.19 million, according to multiple reports. —The Jacksonville Jaguars agreed to terms with veteran nose tackle Al Woods, his agency announced. NFL Network reported the contract is worth \$2.75 million, with \$1 million guaranteed. — Reuters

Scottish FA tells clubs to stop training

EDINBURGH: The Scottish Football Association (SFA) has urged clubs to stop conducting training sessions and adhere to government guidelines on the coronavirus crisis. Following a meeting of their joint response group, the SFA has reminded member clubs "in the strongest possible terms" to "desist" training activities and follow the social distancing advice outlined by the government.

"I would urge our members, and especially our Affiliated National Associations responsible for grassroots football, to ensure clubs observe social distancing guidance outlined by gov-

ernment," SFA chief executive Ian Maxwell said in a statement.

"While many of the instances have been anecdotal, I have seen it for myself this weekend. Please stop it. I urge everyone involved in the game to do what we can to safeguard public health as best we can."

"The message from the First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon), which was reiterated today, could not be clearer when she said 'the advice that is being given to people is not to be seen as optional'. That applies to football as it does across society."

The joint response group said they want their advice to be circulated as widely as possible, including to clubs, parents, players, match officials, staff and supporters. Scottish football has been suspended until at least April 30 due to the coronavirus outbreak, but the SFA added there still remains uncertainty about when the 2019-20 season may resume. — AFP

Coronavirus could force many fighters out of the sport

LONDON: The coronavirus pandemic could force many boxers to leave the sport for financial reasons, leading British promoter Eddie Hearn said on Monday. Hearn, whose Matchroom Boxing promotes world heavyweight champion Anthony Joshua, told the BBC that those fighters starting out in the sport or at the bottom of the ladder faced tough times.

"If this drags on to September, October, November, December, we'll have fighters that have not boxed this year," said Hearn. "The fighters at the top end are going to be fine but the fighters coming through, small hall fighters, ones starting their careers or those who do not have a sponsorship deal face big concerns."

"They will have to give up the sport of boxing and get a job and that's

heartbreaking for someone trying to live their dreams." The British Boxing Board of Control (BBBofC) said on Monday it had extended a ban on all events under its jurisdiction until the end of April.

The Tokyo Summer Olympics, which many amateurs use as a platform before turning professional, look likely to be postponed a year to 2021. "Look at the Olympics — these people have grafted for four years to achieve their dream and fight in Tokyo," commented Hearn.

"There's no chance of these Olympics taking place so what are they going to do? Everything is going to be a complete reshuffle of every sport." Joshua, the WBA, WBO and IBF champion, is due to fight Bulgaria's IBF mandatory challenger Kubrat Pulev in June but that fight could slip to July or later but everything is still up in the air.

Hearn, who has cancelled or rescheduled a number of other fights with no certainty of those happening, said boxing would survive but the same could not be said for all the promoters and businesses. "If you don't run a sustainable business, very quickly this is going to unfold on you like a ton of bricks," he said. — Reuters

Napoli, Lazio backtrack on training

MILAN: Italian clubs Napoli and Lazio have both postponed their planned return to training this week due to the coronavirus pandemic which has killed over 6,000 people in Italy.

Italian football has been on hold since March 9 because of the COVID-19 outbreak which has become the Mediterranean nation's biggest disaster since World War II. But some clubs had been thinking of resuming training behind closed doors.

"SSC Napoli announces that sports activities are suspended until a

date to be decided," the southerners said in a statement. "The resumption of training sessions will be established in relation to the evolution of the health emergency regarding the spread of Covid 19."

Napoli are sixth in Serie A and last trained on March 12, before their Champions League last-16 second leg against Barcelona was postponed.

They had been planning to return to training today. The south of Italy has not been as badly hit by the virus as the epicentre in northern Lombardy. League rivals Lazio and Cagliari also pushed back the date for a return to training. Capital club Lazio — just a point behind champions and Serie A leaders Juventus — have had said they wanted to start training as early as Monday, as had Sardinian outfit Cagliari. All sport in Italy has been suspended until April 3. — AFP

18 Re-organising Olympics a Herculean task: Former IOC marketing head



19 A-League football, Australia's last active sport, pulls plug



19 US Soccer names experienced sports executive Wilson CEO



ATHENS: File photo shows an athlete lights the Olympic torch during the olympic flame handover ceremony for the 2020 Tokyo Summer Olympics, on March 19, 2020 in Athens. —AFP

IOC urged to make quick Olympic decision

TOKYO: The International Olympic Committee came under pressure to speed up its decision about postponing the Tokyo Games yesterday as athletes criticised the four-week deadline and the United States joined calls to delay the competition.

After Canada and Australia withdrew their teams, with the world hunkering down for the coronavirus pandemic, the US Olympic committee said postponement was the best way forward. A growing group of national Olympic committees and sports bodies including World Athletics have called for the Games, set to start on July 24, to be pushed back, an outcome that now appears inevitable. IOC officials are studying a postponement, among other options, but still believe a decision would be "premature" four months from the scheduled start. They will make an announcement within four weeks.

"My interpretation of the IOC's communications is they don't want to cancel, and they don't think they can continue with the July 24 date," senior IOC official Dick Pound told AFP.

"So you're looking at the 'P' word — postponement." The US statement came after a survey of 1,780 US athletes found an overwhelming majority, 68 percent, backed postponement.

The virus lockdown has shut down competition,

including Olympic qualifiers, and made training not just difficult but also dangerous, as athletes risk contracting or spreading COVID-19.

'UNACCEPTABLE, IRRESPONSIBLE'

Several countries have imposed strict stay-at-home orders and international travel has been drastically curtailed as worldwide deaths surge past 16,500 and confirmed cases surpass 378,000.

"Our most important conclusion from this broad athlete response is that even if the current significant health concerns could be alleviated by late summer, the enormous disruptions to the training environment, doping controls and qualification process can't be overcome in a satisfactory manner," the United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee said.

USA Gymnastics also said it was "adding our voice to the chorus advocating for postponement", after USA

Swimming and USA Track and Field had already urged the US Olympic committee to press for a delay.

Meanwhile, British Olympic Association chairman Hugh Robertson told Sky Sports News: "If the virus continues as predicted by the government, I don't think there is any way we can send a team."

With opposition to the July start reaching deafening levels, athletes questioned why the IOC needed weeks to come to a decision. The Olympic torch relay is due to start in Japan on Thursday.

"Such a response is unacceptable, irresponsible, and once again ignores the rights of athletes," Global Athlete, an organisation which aims to speak for sports competitors, said in a statement.

British cyclist Callum Skinner strongly criticised IOC president Thomas Bach, accusing him of placing his own interests first. "Bach's stubbornness and arrogance has spectacularly failed in this instance and he has weakened the Olympic movement," Skinner wrote on Twitter. "This

isn't the first time he has put his own motives above the athletes and the movement."

'DITHER AND DELAY'

British hurdler Dai Greene said the "dither and delay" was "obscene" while Ed Warner, the chairman-designate of British wheelchair rugby, said the IOC had misjudged the mood. "The IOC has said it will make a decision in four weeks," he told the Guardian. "It hasn't got that long. It probably has only got four days."

"The right thing for the IOC to do is to announce it will postpone the Games immediately — and then use the next couple of weeks to decide when it will be. Athletes have led the way on this and the IOC have trailed far behind them. That has to change."

World Athletics said it was prepared to shift its world championships, scheduled for August 6-15 next year in Oregon, to accommodate a potential Olympics next summer, seen as the most likely option. But experts warn shifting the Tokyo Games, which are seven years in the planning and have a price tag of \$12.6 billion, is no simple matter. "It is mind-bogglingly complex to make a sudden change after seven years of preparation for the biggest sporting event in the world," Michael Payne, the IOC's former head of marketing, said. —AFP



America backs postponement

British Olympian attacks IOC chief over Olympics

LONDON: British track cyclist Callum Skinner has labelled International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach "arrogant" and "stubborn" over the organisation's approach to the coronavirus pandemic. The IOC, which has faced strong pressure to postpone the Tokyo Games, scheduled to start on July 24, announced on Sunday delaying the event was one of its options. Bach said a decision on when the Olympics would take place would be made "within the next four weeks".

Canada has pulled out of the Games

and Japan's prime minister on Monday admitted a delay may be "inevitable". Skinner, who won gold and silver medals at the 2016 Olympics and is a member of the British Olympic Association's (BOA) athletes' commission, was scathing about Bach in a social media post on Monday.

"IOC president Thomas Bach's stubbornness and arrogance has spectacularly failed in this instance and he has weakened the Olympic movement," Skinner wrote on Twitter.

"This isn't the first time he has put his own motives above the athletes and the movement." British sprint star Dina Asher-Smith, who won the 200 metres world title last year, said the IOC's delay created further uncertainty for competitors.

"So wait... does this mean that athletes face up to another FOUR weeks of finding

ways to fit in training - whilst potentially putting ourselves, coaches, support staff and loved ones at risk just to find out they were going to be postponed anyway!!!"

'DON'T THINK WE CAN SEND A TEAM'

Meanwhile British Olympic Association chairman Hugh Robertson warned it was unlikely the country could send a team to Tokyo should the 2020 Games go ahead as scheduled. "I think it is very simple. If the virus continues as predicted by the (UK) government, I don't think there is any way we can send a team," Robertson, a former British sports minister, told Sky Sports News.

"And I base that on two things. Firstly, I don't see any way that the athletes and Team GB could be ready by then. "Elite training facilities are perfectly understand-

ably and quite correctly closed around the country, so there is no way they could undertake the preparation they need to get ready for a Games."

"Second, there is the appropriateness of holding an Olympic Games at a time like this. "We are actually in a process where we are talking to all our sports. We will complete that over the next couple of days. At the end of that we have already said to the IOC that we think their four-week pause is absolutely the right thing to do."

"We can't see any way that this can go ahead as things are constituted at the moment." Earlier, a spokesman for Boris Johnson, the British Prime Minister, urged the IOC to resolve the issue as quickly as possible.

"Athletes are facing significant uncertainty in the current environment... We



Callum Skinner

want the International Olympic Committee to make a definitive decision soon, to bring clarity to all of those involved," the spokesman said.

"The sports minister, Nigel Huddleston, set out yesterday (Sunday) that the IOC should be seriously considering postponing the games." —AFP