



One-third of humanity under virus lockdown

4 new coronavirus cases in Kuwait • Saudi reports first death as infections spike

Tokyo begins Olympic task of reorganization

TOKYO: Japan set about the unprecedented task of reorganizing the Tokyo 2020 Olympics Wednesday after making the tough decision to postpone the Games by a year as the coronavirus pandemic locks down one third of the planet. The dramatic step to shift the Olympics, never before seen in peacetime, upends every aspect of the organization - including venues, security, ticketing and accommodation.

In a move symbolic of the difficulties now facing Tokyo, Olympic countdown clocks in the city switched from displaying the number of days to go, instead simply showing today's date and the time. "It's like taking seven years to build the world's biggest jigsaw puzzle and, with just one piece to go, having to start again but now with less time to finish," tweeted Craig Spence, spokesman for the International Paralympic Committee.

It is not even clear exactly when the rescheduled Games will take place, with the International

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- Kuwaitis get 6-month loan repayment respite (Page 3)
- Senate, White House agree \$2tn rescue package (Page 9)

- Loss of smell could reveal hidden virus cases (Page 16)
- Hubei lifts restrictions; no new cases in China (Page 8)

KUWAIT/NEW DELHI/WASHINGTON: India's billion-plus population went into a three-week lockdown yesterday, with a third of the world now under orders to stay indoors, as US politicians agreed to spend \$2 trillion to counter the economic damage of the coronavirus pandemic. Kuwait's ministry of health yesterday confirmed four additional cases of coronavirus in the last 24 hours. The cases are of a Kuwaiti woman who recently returned from the UK and a Kuwaiti man who recently arrived from Saudi Arabia, in addition to two expats from Philippines and Somalia, Health Ministry Spokesman Abdullah Al-Sanad said in a daily briefing.

This brings Kuwait's count of confirmed infections with the novel coronavirus to 195, he said, adding 152 patients are still receiving medical treatment. Six patients are being treated in intensive care units, while a total of 717 cases have completed the quarantine period, Sanad elaborated. Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah earlier yesterday announced the recovery of four additional people, raising the country's total recoveries to 43. The cases are of two Kuwaiti citizens and two residents, the minister told KUNA, noting that lab tests and analyses had shown the recovery of the four patients.

Continued on Page 16



KUWAIT: This picture taken on Tuesday from Hamra Tower shows a view of the empty streets of Kuwait City during a curfew imposed to prevent the further spread of the coronavirus. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

V O L V O

STAY SAFE STAY HOME



Local

Kuwait psychology association sets up free hotline for help during lockdown

'Round the clock' consultations for those facing mental stress due to coronavirus

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Psychological Association (KPA) is providing consultation through the phone for people suffering during these uncertain times. KPA has set up a rapid intervention team to help those suffering from the psychological impacts of coronavirus (COVID-19), as well as the lockdown imposed as a countermeasure to prevent the disease's spread.

"As part of our social responsibility, we formed a rapid intervention team that consists of psychological specialists and consultants. We set a plan of work that includes a free hotline for citizens and expats to call. We provide psychological consultations related to concerns and challenges presented by the coronavirus given by experienced psychologists who are

members of KPA," Dr Asia Al-Jeri, President of KPA told the Kuwait Times.



Rapid intervention team formed

More services are also available. "We are cooperating with other authorities and official institutions to

provide volunteers of psychological consultants to give consultation to those who are in home or institutional quarantine. And we are still working on new ideas to face the coronavirus," she added.

"We also formed a media committee to follow-up the latest news and developments to provide media support through field visits by psychologists," Dr Jeri stressed. "We also made awareness boards with psychological advice regarding coronavirus that was published in social media. Furthermore, we created an awareness video on coronavirus that was also made available on social media."

Different doctors are working on the hotline in different timings as following:

Dr Rashed Al-Sahh: on Monday and Wednesday 10:00 am - 1:00 pm. Call 9797-6168.

Dr Fahad Al-Tasha: daily from 8:00 pm - 12:00 am.

Call 9904-8258.

Dr Othman Al-Asfour: daily 5:00 pm - 8:00 pm. Call 9938-5350.

Dr Mohammed Al-Khalidi (head of this team): daily 9:00 am - 12:00 pm. Call 9903-6470.

Dr Ahmad Al-Khalidi: daily 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm. Call 9910-7965.

Dr Muneera Al-Qattan: Monday and Wednesday 9:00 am - 1:00 pm. Call 9953-3108.

Dr Zainab Al-Saffar: Sunday and Thursday 7:00 pm - 9:00 pm. Call 9954-9908.

Dr Sameera Al-Kandari: Tuesday 9:00 pm - 12:00 am. Call 6770-9434.

Dr Kawthar Al-Yaqout: Monday and Wednesday 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm. Call 5521-0088.

For information and other concerns, call 9401-4283.

Curfew Diaries

Day 3: Fish need water



By Jamie Etheridge

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Over the last two nights thousands of people in Kuwait stood in their apartment windows or balconies shouting out Allahu Akbar (God is Great) just before Isha prayer. This happened in Khaitan, Mahboula, Hawally and Salmiya.

The purpose behind the event is unclear. Those who organized or spread the message to call out Allahu Akbar after the curfew began may have merely wanted to remind us all to pray and thank God during these times of crisis. It may have been a way for Kuwait's expatriate Muslim community to show its faith in the face of uncertainty, a communal show of solidarity at a time when we must all cloister in our individual apartments and homes.

Across the world we have seen similar acts of community despite the requirements of #socialdistancing. In Spain, quarantined residents exercised on their individual balconies while a fitness instructor stood on the rooftop below, guiding them. In Iraq, Nujin Hasan played the violin in residents in his apartment complex who were #stayingathome. Children in Italy and in Brooklyn, New York are hanging rainbow art from their home windows to add a moment of positivity and hope to their neighborhoods.

In India, people have already organized clapping on rooftops and balconies as a way to show appreciation for the thousands of doctors, nurses, lab techs and hospital staff who are on the frontlines fighting the coronavirus.

These communal actions, despite the social distancing requirements, speak to the heart of what it means to be human, and especially to be human during a pandemic. Human beings are social animals and we need contact and social interaction, the same way fish need water and birds need the sky. The incredible innovations of the 21st century, the online and virtual worlds, social media and all the ways we connect virtually are now important parts of our lives.

But they do not and cannot fully replace the fundamental need for human contact. Now that contact is forbidden and dangerous, we are finding new and creative ways to 'stay in touch'. Last night on the balconies of apartments across this Muslim land, coreligionists reminded each other that we are here, united in this crisis and that God is Great. We need these shows of togetherness - even if at a distance of 1 meter apart.

Community is one of the greatest strengths of humankind. We have survived and thrived thanks to our ability and willingness to work together in groups. Right now, our need to gather makes us vulnerable. It is a weakness that the coronavirus exploits to its full benefit. And so we are staying at home, self-quarantining as much as possible and hoping that by flattening the curve of the spread of this virus, we will give more of humankind a chance of surviving.

In the meantime, we can still call from our windows or sing from our balconies and clap from our rooftops, to show that no matter how separate we may be, we are all in this together.

Low wage earners suffer from loss of mass transit

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: The suspension of public transportation is causing logistical and financial hardship for hundreds of thousands of low wage workers in Kuwait. On March 12, the government announced the suspension of all mass transit as part of the efforts instituted by the ministry of health to slow the spread of the deadly coronavirus (COVID-19).

"The bus system is vitally important for many people living in Kuwait. Total annual passengers on legally operated buses are estimated at close to 120 million. This figure represents approximately 122 trips per 1,000 persons per day," writes Jassim Al-Awadhi and Geoffrey Martin in a post on the London School of Economics blog.

The majority of passengers are low wage earning expatriates who are still required to work in private sector companies and businesses that have remained open. Now these people are scrambling, trying to find affordable transportation to work at a time when taxis have also raised fares and are more scarce on the streets.

A one way bus ride costs 250 fils whereas a taxi ride can run from KD 1 to KD 5 depending on distance between the pick up and drop off location. Some companies have arranged private transportation, sending buses to collect their staff. Others, however, leave the burden of reaching work on the employee.

"My work is in Kuwait City, I live in Salmiya so I have to pay 500 fils fare daily. Now I have to pay KD4 for my taxi back and forth," said Dave who works in an office. "This is not good for me since my company will not pay my taxi ride per day. Now for more than a week, I have been paying taxis as all staff



KUWAIT: A Kuwaiti police car patrols deserted streets in Kuwait City, on March 23, 2020, a day after authorities declared a nationwide curfew amid the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

are required to report to work every day. My salary is probably only enough for transport. I have to pay house rent, and I have to send money to my kids back home. What will happen to me at the end of the month?" he explained. "I am just working for them, but I have no benefit now from my job at all. But I don't want to lose my job. That is why I am closing my eyes on the taxi fare," he said.

In some areas, there are illegal or temporary vehicles transporting passengers that allow passengers to ride on its van in exchange for a slightly smaller fare than what a taxi might charge. Some workers in Farwaniya and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh share vans or private cars.

"In my place, there are vans or minibuses taking passengers, but they are being very careful since this practice is technically illegal," Dave said. "It appears like a company service vehicle but in fact they are minibuses taking passengers."

A tea boy from Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh also com-

plained of the money he must pay to take private transport daily to his work. "I am a regular bus passenger and in order for me to come to work every day, I ride a taxi. But taxi fares are too much, and the company doesn't care," he said. "Most of my salary this month will go only for taxi fares. If they are not going to pay the amount I paid for my taxi, I will be broke certainly by next month," he added.

The average salary of an expatriate working in the private sector is KD 251 according to the Public Authority for Civil Information. Low wage earners like office boys or cleaners will earn considerably less, as low as KD 60 or KD 80 a month.

In some areas, to be able to cater to passengers, regular taxis are converting their cars into a bus type-scheme. "Rather than roaming around without passengers, I prefer to accept three passengers all going to one destination. Like from Kuwait City to Salmiya, I ask them to pay KD 2 per person. It is good rather than paying KD 2.5 or KD 3," a taxi driver said.

Coronavirus in Kuwait: What we know so far

KUWAIT: Kuwait has so far recorded 195 cases infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). With the exception of six 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, 43 people have recovered completely after previously been infected with the virus, the ministry said. There are 152 people receiving treatment and 211 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

All arrivals to Kuwait from all countries are to be placed under compulsory institutional quarantine for 14 days, during which the person is monitored, and prescribed health procedures are applied, the health ministry said. Kuwait halted all commercial flights until further notice. Authorities also announced a public holiday in the country from March 12 to April 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 staff); first from March 12 to March 12, and later extended it until March 29, before eventually suspending schools until August for grade 12 and October for other stages.

Kuwait suspended issuing entry permits and visas unless those issued through diplomatic missions. 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.

Hotlines

- The Ministry of Health has set the following hotlines to receive inquiries about the coronavirus 24/7: 24970967 - 96049698 - 99048619.
- The Education Ministry set the following hotlines to receive inquiries on school closures related to the anti-coronavirus measures:
 - 24970967 (24/7 hotline)
 - 51575591 (Capital Educational Zone)
 - 51576117 (Hawally Educational Zone)
 - 51576576 (Farwaniya Educational Zone)
 - 51577055 (Jahra Educational Zone)
 - 51577655 (Ahmadi Educational Zone)
 - 51577951 (Mubarak Al-Kabeer Educational Zone)
 - 51578171 (Religious Studies Department)
 - 51588599 (Private Education Department)
 - 51592515 (Services Department)
 - 51594544 (Public Relations Department)

Meds containing chloroquine withdrawn

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Health Ministry decided to withdraw all quantities of medicines containing hydroxychloroquine or chloroquine from private pharmacies and limit them to hospitals and health centers only. In a statement to KUNA, the ministry's Undersecretary of Health for Drug and Food Control Affairs, Dr Abdullah Al-Bader, said Tuesday that the decision stipulated to obligate pharmacies to provide the Drug Inspection Department with a detailed statement of these drugs quantities. The decision came in the interest of the ministry to tighten control over the exchange and circulation of medicines and to preserve the health of patients, he added. Bader indicated that it aims to track and monitor the quantities spent from these drugs to prevent misuse or monopoly and provide it to patients for reasons of use approved by the health ministry.

He noted that the drug Blacknell which contains hydroxychloroquine is registered in Kuwait to treat immune diseases such as arthritis, lupus and skin allergy diseases, pointing that it has not been licensed and approved so far from the normal bodies as a drug to treat the coronavirus. This treatment is currently used as an experimental treatment within protocols for specific cases of patients under the supervision of a specialized medical staff who closely follow the patient and monitor the occurrence of any adverse symptoms or complications during the treatment period. — KUNA

Local

Premier visits Interior's command center, checkpoints around Kuwait

Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled commends public on complying with regulations



KUWAIT: His Highness Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah listens to a demonstration during his visit to the Interior Ministry's command center. — KUNA photos



His Highness Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah speaks with Kuwait National Guard Undersecretary Lt Gen Hashem Al-Refaie (left) during a visit to a security checkpoint.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah visited yesterday the Interior Ministry's command center and several checkpoints set by the ministry and Kuwait National Guard (KNG) to follow up on efforts to impose the partial curfew, a measure taken to prevent spread of coronavirus (COVID-19). His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled was accompanied during the visits by the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior, and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh. At the conclusion of his visits, His Highness the Prime Minister commended 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 for setting the guidelines for security forces to carry out their patriotic duties. He also praised the Kuwaiti leadership on the care and support given to all forces tasked with protecting citizens and residents of the country. His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled commended Kuwaitis and residents on complying with regulations aimed at protecting the country from the coronavirus, hoping that the situation will end well for the people of Kuwait. — KUNA



His Highness Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah speaks with police officers during a visit to a security checkpoint.



Kuwait discusses with GCC COVID-19 coordination

KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah made separate phone calls on Tuesday with Saudi Minister of Foreign Affairs Faisal bin Farhan Al-Saud, UAE Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, Qatar's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammad bin Abdulrahman bin Jassem Al-Thani, Bahrain's Foreign Minister Dr. Abdulatif Al-Zayani and Oman's Minister Responsible

for Foreign Affairs Yousef bin Alawi, addressing cooperation at the bilateral and GCC levels for coping with repercussions of the pandemic coronavirus in addition to reviewing efforts in this respect. — KUNA



Dr Ahmad Al-Sabah

Banks delay Kuwaitis' loan payments



KUWAIT: Kuwait Banking Association announced on Tuesday that domestic banks would delay payment of installments of consumer and installed loans for Kuwaiti citizens for six months. The banks are also cancelling interests and proceeds to be posted by this postponement or any other fees. The association said in a statement after an emergency board session that the banks would also postpone payment of the installments of credit cards for all Kuwaiti clients for six months, along with cancelling interests, earnings to be made from this delay or any other fee. They will

also delay installments of loans and credit facilities for the clients, namely owners of small and medium companies, for the same period, in addition to removing interests and earnings identical to those in the abovementioned cases. This measure is being taken in compliance with desire of His Highness the Amir urging the country stakeholders to take into consideration economic effect caused by the emergency situation against spread of coronavirus. The statement affirmed that the banks would take any precaution necessary to preserve the country's financial conditions. — KUNA

Govt announces fund to support countermeasures

KUWAIT: A fund to support Kuwait's coronavirus (COVID-19) countermeasures is established to allow monetary contributions from institutes, companies and individuals, said a government official on Tuesday. Speaking during the cabinet press conference held at Seif Palace, Government spokesman Tareq Al-Mezrem indicated that the decision to establish the fund came in line with a cabinet decision, adding that a website for the fund was established to receive support. Details on banks involved in the fund will be declared soon, he affirmed.

Meanwhile, Mezrem welcomed the National Assembly's cooperation with the government in the current coronavirus crisis, saying that amendments made to laws combating contagious disease were a very important step to defeat the spread of the viral infection. The amendments will also halt any individuals

meaning to harm society via intentionally spreading disease, he indicated. The government spokesman took to remain citizens and residents alike to abide by measures set by the government to curb the spread of the coronavirus.

In the meantime, the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) granted a total of KD 30 million (about \$95 million) in support of governmental efforts to confront the coronavirus spread. KFAED said on Tuesday that this grant comes out of the fund's social responsibility and in support of government efforts to confront this virus and limit its spread. KFAED also expressed a sense of admiration to efforts exerted by the medical and nursing cadres and other parties at all levels during combating the spread of the virus, and to preserve the health and safety of citizens and residents in the country. —KUNA

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Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: This picture taken on March 24, 2020 from Al-Hamra Tower shows a view of the empty streets in Kuwait City during a government-imposed curfew as a measure to prevent further spread of COVID-19 coronavirus disease. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

LuLu Hypermarket launches coronavirus preventative measures

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KUWAIT: LuLu Hypermarket, the leading hypermarket in the region, has undertaken various steps in the interest of public health and safety amidst fears of the coronavirus pandemic. LuLu hypermarket is adhering to health and cleanliness standards as stipulated by the Ministry of Health.

As part of the coronavirus preventative measures, LuLu is providing sanitizers and gloves to shoppers across all stores in Kuwait. There is also 'priority health counters' across outlets that offers healthcare providers easy checkout as a gesture to appreciate their sincere and selfless efforts. Moreover, a variety of preventative measures to combat the coronavirus have been implemented across the stores, including encouraging maintaining social distancing as shoppers queue at checkout counters.

LuLu Hypermarket remains committed to benefiting the community by keeping food supplies stocked while maintaining health standards. The hypermarket is also offering customers the widest range and variety of quality products from around the world at highly competitive prices. The health measures is part of the Hypermarket's customer-oriented approach of constantly interacting with customers and adding value to their shopping experience.



Local

Prime Minister commends cooperation with parliament against coronavirus

Assembly toughens measures against people spreading disease willingly



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah commended Tuesday cooperation with the National Assembly in the fight against the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19). Kuwait's parliament has done tremendous work, issuing laws for tackling this important matter, His Highness the Prime Minister said. Delivering his address at the end of the regular session of parliament, Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled affirmed that the MPs had carried out their duty to protect cities during this alarming situation. He called on citizens and residents alike to abide by the measures put by the state and parliament to protect the country from spread of the coronavirus, saying that following such measures will help all to overcome the disease.

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," His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled said in a speech during the session. "We should learn from other experiences, and to spare our country from sliding into chaos," His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled said, calling for a continuing cooperation with all parties involved which are 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 parliament approved on Tuesday a draft resolution concerning amendments to laws connected with protection from contagious diseases. Deliberations saw 56 of the 57 MPs in attendance agreeing to the draft laws, while one member voting against the amendments. The proposed modifications toughen legal action against individuals contracting disease and not complying with preventative regulations. Those spreading contagion willingly will face 10 years imprisonment, a KD 30,000 fine (approximately \$95,000), or both punishments. Any other violation is punishable with a three-month imprisonment, KD 5,000 fine (some \$15,000), or both.

Painful scenes
His Highness the Prime Minister also stressed the importance of 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

Kuwait Amir's
Meanwhile, National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem expressed thanks to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for his directives and successful management of the coronavirus outbreak crisis. During the session, Ghanem voiced great appreciation of the tremendous efforts exerted by His Highness the Prime Minister and his team to fight the coronavirus challenge. Ghanem also apprised Kuwaiti people 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.

In the meantime, Ghanem pointed to the parliament approval to amend the law related to health



precautions to prevent communicable diseases and to propose a law to amend the decree law to issue the law of civil and commercial pleadings within a week instead of a month according to Article (65) of the constitution to deal with the current condi-

tions in the country. Ghanem noted that he urged the parliamentary committees to hold its meetings according to the health procedures and with the least number of attendees to accomplish the largest number of laws so that they can be approved once the sessions are back. — KUNA





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MP Safaa Al-Hashem wearing a protective mask waves as she arrives the parliament session.

Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah waves as he arrives for the session.



Indonesia's health system on the brink as virus surge looms

India's temple economy hit by coronavirus



WASHINGTON: (From left) US Surgeon General Jerome Adams, Response Coordinator for the White House Coronavirus Task Force Deborah Birx, US Vice President Mike Pence and US President Donald Trump take part in a Fox News virtual town hall meeting with anchor Bill Hemmer from the Rose Garden of the White House on Tuesday. —AFP

Trump declares virus fight close to end

California warns youths on virus after teen tests positive, dies

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump declared the beginning of the end of the coronavirus crisis in the United States on Tuesday and called for a quick end to social distancing, even as New York's governor compared the growing pandemic to a "bullet train". Trump, who is keen to get his reelection campaign back on track, said that social distancing has caused too much pain to the US economy, prompting Congress to debate a historic rescue package.

"Our country - it's not built to shut down," he said on Fox News. "You can destroy a country this way by closing it down. I would love to have the country opened up and just raring to go by Easter," said Trump, declaring he could see "light at the end of the tunnel". The president said he looked forward to "packed" churches on Easter, which is on April 12 - less than three weeks away.

Social distancing and quarantine measures have been instituted across much of the United States, with stay-at-home orders for more than a third of the population, bringing the world's biggest economy to an abrupt halt. An Ipsos/Axios poll released Tuesday found that 74 percent of Americans have stopped attending large gatherings, while 48 percent have canceled travel plans, leaving airports deserted.

Another significant casualty of the shutdown has been the presidential campaign, with Trump having to halt a relentless series of big rallies around the country. Health experts have advised the measures as the foundation for preventing the easily transmitted, potentially fatal illness from multiplying uncontrollably. The administration on March 16 declared "15 Days to Slow the Spread", a period which expires early next week.

But Trump made clear Tuesday that he thinks the response to coronavirus deaths has been blown out of proportion, saying "we lose more than that to automobile accidents. We didn't call up the automobile companies to say, 'Stop making cars.'" Later, Trump appeared to retreat from his Easter goal at a press conference alongside the renowned government infectious diseases specialist Anthony Fauci.

"We'll only do it if it's good," Trump said, adding that the reopening could be limited to a "portion" of the nation. He mentioned areas like farm country, Texas and the west, often sparsely populated. His own press secretary, Stephanie Grisham, quarantined since coming into contact with Brazilian officials almost two weeks ago, has tested negative, the White House said Tuesday.

'We are not slowing it'

More than 700 people have died from the new coronavirus in the United States, while the number of confirmed

cases is near 54,000, a tracker maintained by Johns Hopkins University showed Tuesday. The US has the third-highest number of confirmed cases globally, behind China and Italy. And despite Trump's relentless optimism, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo warned of "astronomical numbers" in the state and the nation's biggest city. "We are not slowing it. And it is accelerating on its own," he said, comparing the spread of the disease to "a bullet train."

Politics vs health?

With his reelection campaign temporarily knocked off track, Trump is now seeking to turn the coronavirus calamity into a dramatic comeback story that will deliver him a second term in November. One of his main claims to a second term, prior to the coronavirus outbreak, was the strong economy. "We can't lose a Boeing, we can't lose some of these companies," he said on the Fox News broadcast from the White



My mother is not expendable



House. "If we lose those companies we're talking about hundreds of thousands of jobs, millions of jobs."

However, his push for a quick reopening of the economy carries the risk that some will see it as putting wealth over the survival of the sick, especially the vulnerable elderly. Texas Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick said as much, urging those over 70 "not to sacrifice the country". Cuomo, whose daily news conferences have made him a major national voice during the crisis, shot back at those calling for rapid economic reopening, saying "my mother is not expendable".

Meanwhile, California officials on Tuesday pleaded for young people to heed safety warnings over the new coronavirus after a teen tested positive and died. It would be the first known juvenile death from the COVID-19 illness in the United States. A statement by the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health warned the cause of death "will

require further evaluation". "Though earlier tests indicated a positive result for COVID-19, the case is complex and there may be an alternate explanation for this fatality," it said.

The novel coronavirus is not typically severe for juveniles, and the unidentified youth from Lancaster - just north of Los Angeles - did not have any pre-existing medical conditions, Mayor Eric Garcetti said. "A teenager in good health succumbed to this virus," said Garcetti, calling the fatality a "sober reminder that this can take anyone". "To the young people that are out there - this can hit you too. Know that your behavior can save a life, and can take a life. And that life could be yours," he added.

Lancaster Mayor R Rex Parris told the Los Angeles Times the patient was a teenage boy who died of septic shock and the boy's father was also infected with coronavirus. California Governor Gavin Newsom emphasized that the teenager's death should be a warning to all, noting that half of the people infected in California are between the ages of 18 and 49. "What more evidence do you need than the loss of a young person's life?" said Newsom. "I just cannot impress upon young people out there more, the seriousness of this moment, and how critical they are to ultimately getting us on the other side by practicing that social distancing."

Newsom said while hospitalization rates are higher among older people, the virus was hitting all age groups. "Young people can and will be impacted by this virus," he said. "With this tragic death, it is a reminder for everybody to take this seriously," he added. Multiple studies have found the virus disproportionately affects older patients and those with underlying conditions.

A recent report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found juveniles "appear to have milder" illness, with no intensive care admissions or deaths in the US as of March 16. "Similar to reports from other countries, this finding suggests that the risk for serious disease and death from COVID-19 is higher in older age groups," it found, using the scientific term for the disease caused by the SARS-cov-2 virus.

Only two known cases of minors dying from the disease in China, where the virus emerged late last year, have been recorded. In one case, an infant had a pre-existing intestinal condition. The other's situation was not known. "The risk for serious disease and death in COVID-19 cases among persons in the United States increases with age," the CDC report added. California, the most populous US state, has been one of the worst-hit during the pandemic. —AFP

Boko Haram kill nearly 100 Chadian troops

N'DJAMENA, Chad: Boko Haram militants have killed nearly 100 Chadian soldiers in a seven-hour attack on an island army base, in their deadliest assault yet on the country's armed forces. President Idriss Deby told Chad television he travelled to the scene of the attack on Tuesday to pay tribute to the 92 dead soldiers, saying it was the first time so many troops had been lost. The attack early Monday morning in Boma, Lac province, is part of an expanding jihadist campaign in the vast, marshy Lake Chad area, where the borders of Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria converge.

Boko Haram launched an insurgency in Nigeria in 2009 before beginning incursions in its neighboring countries to the east. "We lost 92 of our soldiers, non-commissioned officers and officers," in the attack in Boma, the president said. "It's the first time we have lost so many men," he said. The attack on soldiers on the Boma peninsula lasted at least seven hours, and reinforcements sent to help became bogged down and were also targeted, several military sources told AFP.

"The camp is on an island where the ways in were controlled by Boko Haram fighters, they were able to leave as they wanted and without being forced out by the army," one security official said. "The enemy has hit at our defenses hard in this zone," the senior officer said. One military official said army vehicles were destroyed, including armored vehicles, and captured military arms were carried off in speedboats by Boko Haram. The base was taken by surprise by the 5:00 am attack, the official said.

Boko Haram has stepped up its attacks in recent months on the islands of the Lake Chad basin where it takes advantage of the vast terrain to launch assaults. Boko Haram's insurgency has killed 36,000 people and displaced nearly two million in northeastern Nigeria since it began, according to the UN. Since 2015, countries in the region have cooperated in the Multinational Joint Force, a regional coalition engaged around Lake Chad with the help of local residents formed into vigilante groups.

But the regional militaries are struggling to cope with the jihadist insurgency. In Cameroon, violence increased in 2019 and early 2020. In Cameroon's Far North, 275 people were killed by jihadist attacks in 2019, most of them civilians, according to a report published by Amnesty International in December. In Niger, 174 soldiers were killed in three attacks in January and December. —AFP

Gunmen storm Sikh temple in Kabul assault

KABUL: Gunmen stormed a Sikh-Hindu temple in central Kabul yesterday and were locked in an ongoing battle with security forces, an official said, in the latest assault on the Afghan capital. The attack comes as Afghanistan is facing myriad crises including a raging insurgency, political deadlock, a massive cut in US aid, a flailing peace process and rising coronavirus cases. "At around 7:45 am (0315 GMT), a number of attackers entered a Hindu-Sikh temple," interior ministry spokesman Tariq Arian told AFP. "People are stuck

inside the building and (security forces) are trying to rescue them."

The Taliban denied any involvement in the attack. While no other group immediately claimed responsibility, Islamic State jihadists frequently orchestrate assaults on the country's religious minorities. "There are about 150 people inside the temple. Families are living there and they usually gather to offer prayers in the mornings," said Anarkali Kaur Honaryar, a Sikh member of the Afghan parliament. "Some people inside the temple are hiding and their phones are off. I am very concerned."

IS has a history of targeting Afghan Sikhs and Hindus including a suicide bombing in Jalalabad in July 2018 that killed 19 people and wounded 21. Around 1,000 Sikhs and Hindus are estimated to reside in what is otherwise an overwhelmingly

Muslim nation. Earlier this month, IS militants killed 32 people and wounded dozens more in an attack at a political gathering in Kabul.

Aid cut

To add to the country's woes, Washington slashed the amount of aid to the country this week. The decision came after US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo visited Kabul in a bid to resolve a standoff between President Ashraf Ghani and his rival Abdullah Abdullah, who also is proclaiming himself president following a contested election. Pompeo, who lashed out at their "failure" to come to an agreement, said the US would immediately cut \$1 billion and was "prepared" to pull another \$1 billion in 2021, with further cuts possible after that.

The US and the Taliban signed a

deal last month that was supposed to pave the way for talks between the Afghan leadership and the insurgents, but with Kabul unable to agree who is in government, the talks have stalled. With a GDP of only about \$20 billion, the cuts represent a devastating blow to Afghanistan's donor-dependent economy.

Meanwhile, coronavirus is continuing to spread across Afghanistan. Officially there are 74 confirmed cases and two deaths, but many observers fear the number is far higher. The impoverished country is testing few people. "social distancing" is an abstract concept for an illiterate population accustomed to crowding into mosques and large family gatherings, and thousands of people have returned from pilgrimages to coronavirus-hit Iran in recent weeks. —AFP

International

Aid-deprived and under-equipped, northeast Syria faces virus threat

Displacement camps are the gravest concern

QAMISHLI, Syria: Deprived of cross-border aid and already low on medical supplies, northeast Syria is grappling with the threat of a virus outbreak that aid groups and officials fear could ravage the region. Home to sprawling displacement camps hosting some 100,000 people, including the families of the Islamic State group, the Kurdish-held northeast has yet to declare a single infection. But with the region severely under-equipped, local officials have started to sound the alarm after Damascus announced the country's first coronavirus case on Sunday.

"Even before the novel coronavirus arrived, our needs were huge, and now, in light of the outbreak, we need even more support" from the international community, said Jawan Mustafa, head of the Kurdish administration's health department. "We don't have the means to do this on our own." Nine years of war have battered healthcare across Syria, but the situation in the Kurdish-held northeast is particularly critical, especially in massive displacement camps such as Al-Hol, which is home to tens of thousands of people.

Unlike Syria's rebel-held northwest, where UN aid enters via Turkey, the northeast is deprived of cross-border channels for UN medical assistance. Deliveries from within Syria, on the other hand, require permission from the central government in Damascus, which has yet to extend relief. "With the UN no longer able to provide medical supplies from across the border, the ability of many humanitarian organizations to meet the healthcare needs of those in camps such as Al-Hol... has already been compromised," the International Rescue Committee warned Monday.

'Corona time' in Europe's main migrant camp

LESBOS, Greece: In Europe's biggest asylum seeker camp of Moria, on the Greek island of Lesbos, authorities are trying to keep residents apart from a population with at least three coronavirus cases. But in a sprawling, over-stretched facility that was already a health hazard before the virus made landfall in Greece, there is widespread concern. "As you all know we are in corona time and... the (biggest) problem that we have is overcrowding inside these camps," Mohamed Omid, an asylum seeker from Afghanistan posted on Facebook Tuesday from inside Moria.

There have been 20 recorded deaths and 743 officially announced infections from the coronavirus in Greece, which has a population of 11 million. Three of

the cases have been reported among Lesbos islanders. There are nearly 38,000 people crammed into over-stretched refugee centres on the islands of Lesbos, Samos, Chios, Leros and Kos. Moria alone has over 19,000.

'No chance of social distancing'

The European parliament's civil liberties, justice and home affairs committee this week called for urgent measures to relieve pressure on the camps. "Many of those in the camps are already in precarious health situations due to the bad conditions in which they have lived for a long time," said Juan Fernando Lopez Aguilar, a Spanish socialist MEP who chairs the committee. "There is no chance of isolation or social distancing, nor is it possible to ensure appropriate hygienic conditions," he said, adding that there are only six intensive care beds available on Lesbos. As the island camps were originally intended to handle around 6,000 people, many sleep outdoors in makeshift shelters with minimal access to hygiene.

Cruise passengers hold hopes of reaching land

SANTIAGO: More than 1,800 people stuck onboard a cruise ship off the Pacific coast of South America, with 42 complaining of flu-like symptoms, are desperately hoping to be allowed to dock - somewhere. "Testing times," Australian couple Dimiti and Neal Bates wrote on Facebook. "Please don't forget us." The Zaandam liner run by Holland America left Buenos Aires, Argentina, on March 7 and was supposed to arrive last Saturday at San Antonio, near Santiago in Chile.

Its plight is the latest affecting the global cruise industry, which has seen vessels refused entry to ports and others locked down after new-coronavirus cases were confirmed onboard during the pandemic. Along the way, the Zaandam docked in Punta Arenas, in Chile's far south, before leaving there just days before Chilean President Sebastian Pinera closed the country's borders on March 18.

Soon after, the company suspended all its cruises due to measures including the closure of land, air and sea borders imposed by governments all

Short on doctors, Balkans brace for worst of coronavirus

SKOPJE: With hospitals lacking equipment and low on doctors who have been steadily moving abroad, Balkan countries fear the worst as they watch the new coronavirus ravage their far richer European neighbors. "If much bigger and wealthier countries couldn't contain the sharp increase of infections, what can be expected from ours?" Zoran Hristovski, a Skopje resident in his late 40s, said. It is a widely held concern across the Balkans, where many are nervously waiting for the coronavirus to

No tests
Mustafa of the Kurdish administration said nine centres across the northeast are being equipped to hold suspected cases. The IRC said three hospitals among these have been identified to quarantine and treat suspected cases, but two of them are not fully equipped. Only 28 beds are available in intensive care units across these three hospitals, and only two doctors trained to use the scarce ventilators available, the organization said. Mustafa echoed similar concerns, adding that the region does not have access to diagnosis tests.

As a result, samples from suspected cases were being sent to labs in Damascus for testing, rendering the Kurdish authorities increasingly reliant on the help of a regime bent on stripping them of the semi-autonomy they have achieved during Syria's war. But displacement camps, according to the health official, are the gravest concern.

Social distancing measures, enforced worldwide to stymie a coronavirus spread, cannot be applied in such settings, Mustafa warned. "The camp is, in and of itself, a social gathering and this is the problem," he said. To prevent the virus from reaching the overcrowded settlements, Mustafa said officials have restricted the entry of relief workers except in urgent cases. In the event of an actual outbreak, a large tent in each settlement will be transformed into a quarantine zone, he added. "There isn't much else we can do."

Water cuts

Amid the alarm, the Kurdish administration on Monday enforced a 15-day lockdown. "The risk of

'Health bomb'

The situation was recently termed a "health bomb" by government spokesman Stelios Petsas. In Moria, not everyone has access to water and refuse routinely piles up. With staff and police now called away because of the lockdown, many residents are fearful. "The virus has brought chaos... the police are not here, staff do not come," said Sayed Nasid Haidari, an Afghan who used to work for the government in Kabul.

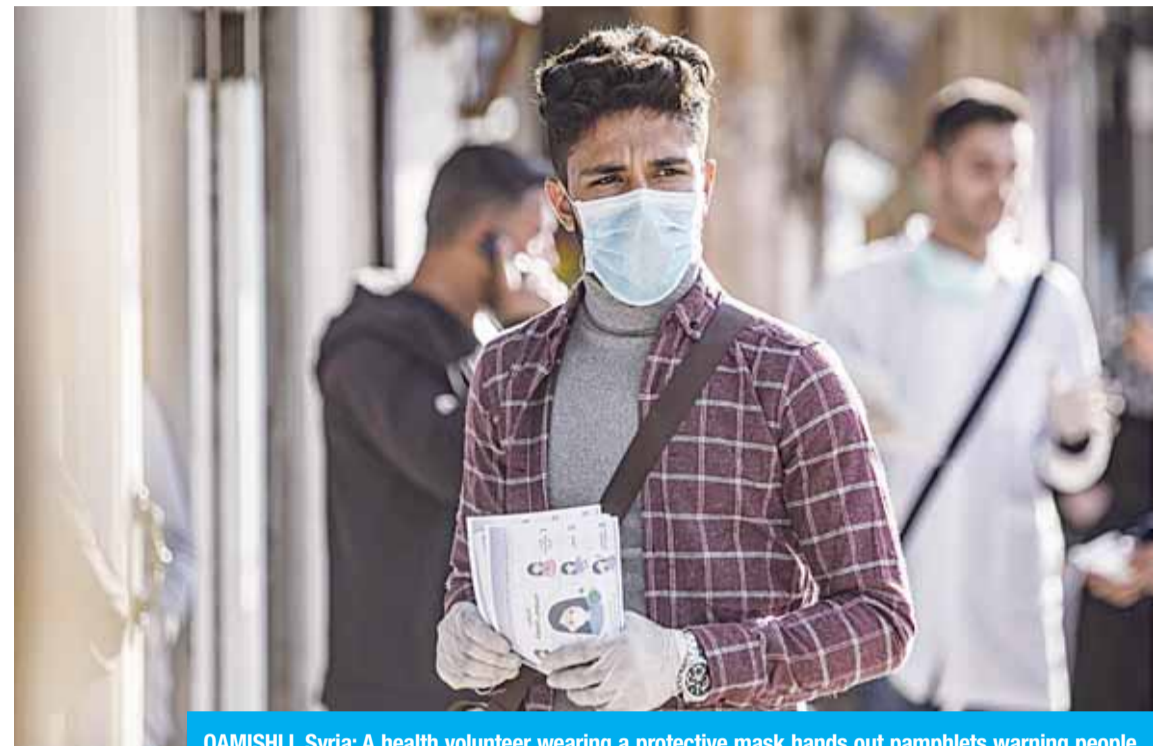
"Moria is divided into two groups. Around 20 percent are scared and hiding in their tents, and 80 percent are still walking around as if nothing is happening," said Haidari, who has been at the camp with his son and pregnant wife since November. "Before this is over, fear will bring more problems than the virus itself," he added. "We are afraid for our lives," said ?brahim Mohamet Hussein, a Somali former journalist who has been at the camp for six months. "The food is not enough for all. We cannot go to market. We cannot feed our children." "The majority of the asylum seekers are aware of the coronavirus and stay at their tents. They also (hear) from relatives in other

countries and they are scared," the camp's deputy manager Dimitris Vafeas, told AFP.

Nationwide lockdown

In recent weeks, asylum-seekers have begun banding together to protect themselves and others in the camp. With help from Stand By Me, a Greek aid group, a group of Afghan women has sewn reusable cotton masks, as there is a nationwide shortage in protective gear. Omid is part of MCAF, the Moria Corona Awareness Team, a Facebook group formed to help fellow asylum seekers stay ahead of the virus with information.

In the past week, refugee groups have also created different language teams denoted by a badge-white for Arabic, blue for Dari and Farsi - to organize orderly access to local supermarkets for the various nationalities in the camp. Greece on Monday enforced a nationwide lockdown, limiting people to their homes except for essential outings. In the camps, separate regulations have been announced to keep asylum seekers as distant from the local population as possible. —AFP



QAMISHLI, Syria: A health volunteer wearing a protective mask hands out pamphlets warning people about the coronavirus along a market street on March 22, 2020. —AFP

a virus outbreak here is very high," warned Mazlum Abdi, the head of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, urging residents to stay home. But the United Nations children's agency UNICEF has warned that water cuts are further putting hundreds of thousands at risk of contracting the coronavirus. The Allouk water station near Ras al-Ain, a border town controlled by Turkey and its Syrian proxies, has not pumped water to the region for days in an interruption that a war monitor and the state news agency SANA blame on Ankara.

Both the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights

and SANA accuse Turkey of deliberately turning off taps at the pumping station, which UNICEF said supplies water to around 460,000 people at a time when hygiene can save lives. "The interruption of water supply during the current efforts to curb the spread of the coronavirus disease puts children and families at unacceptable risk," UNICEF's Syria representative Fran Equiza said. "Uninterrupted, reliable access to safe water is essential to ensure children and families in the area don't have to resort to unsafe" sources, she said. —AFP

Gangs call curfews as coronavirus hits Rio favelas

RIO DE JANEIRO: The "baile funk" dance parties have been called off. Some open-air drug markets are closed for business. Gangs and militias have imposed strict curfews. Coronavirus is coming, and Rio de Janeiro's lawless favelas are gearing up for the onslaught. City of God, a sprawling complex of slums made famous in a hit 2002 movie of the same name, registered the first confirmed case of coronavirus in Rio's favelas over the weekend.

Now, with the state government woefully underfunded and Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro widely criticized for a slow response to the outbreak, criminal gangs that have long held sway across Rio's favelas are taking their own precautions against the virus, according to residents and press reports. According to well-sourced Rio newspaper Extra, City of God gangsters have been driving round the slum, blaring out a recorded message to residents. "We're imposing a curfew because nobody is taking this seriously," the message said, according to Extra's Tuesday story. "Whoever is in the street screwing around or going for a walk will receive a corrective and serve as an example. Better to stay home doing nothing. The message has been given." City of God residents, who declined to give their names for fear of retribution, confirmed an evening curfew and other restrictions.

The gangs' concern over the outbreak echoes fears nationwide about the fate of Brazil's nearly 15 million favela residents confronting what some have dubbed "the disease of the rich". The coronavirus landed in the country with wealthier Brazilians returning from Europe, but is quickly migrating into poorer communities, where crowded quarters, informal labor and weak public services threaten to accelerate its spread.

Drug gangs or rival paramilitaries often act as de facto authorities in the favelas. With little or no government presence in the neighborhoods, gangs enforce social contracts. They also engage in regular shootouts with each other and police forces. Across Brazil, some 40 million people lack access to the public water supply, while 100 million - nearly half the population - live without a connection to sewage treatment, according to the country's National Water Agency.

"Basic sanitation is terrible," said Jefferson Maia, a 27-year-old resident of the City of God. "Sometimes, we don't even have water to wash our hands properly. We are very concerned with the coronavirus issue." Thamiris Deveza, a family doctor working in Rio's Alemao complex of slums, said residents had been complaining for the last two weeks about a lack of water in their homes, making it difficult for them to clean their hands and protect themselves from the fast-spreading virus. She said many pharmacies in the neighborhoods had run out of hand sanitizer. When available, it was prohibitively expensive.

Coronavirus cases are expanding quickly in Brazil. The country had 2,201 confirmed cases on Tuesday, with 46 related deaths, according to the Health Ministry. Rio state, where around a fifth of the population lives in favelas, now has 305 cases. Governor Wilson Witzel warned on Friday that the state's public health system was in danger of "collapse" within 15 days. Rio Mayor Marcelo Crivella has said that officials will deposit free soap at entrances of the city's favelas and relocate older people with health problems to hotels. The city has already signed a deal to secure 400 rooms, he said. —Reuters



PUNTA ARENAS, Chile: The Zaandam cruise ship with 1,800 people on board is seen on March 16, 2020. —AFP

where they are provided their meals by room service. "Since it is flu season, and COVID-19 testing is not available on board, it is difficult to determine the cause of these elevated cases at this time," said Holland America. Since then, the ship has continued northwards and by Tuesday was off the coast of Peru, where local authorities told AFP the liner would not be allowed to dock in the port of Salaverry. Peru closed its borders last week and "already prohibited the entry of two other cruise ships," official Peruvian sources told AFP under condition of anonymity. —AFP

professionals. "And usually it is the best quality doctors who go abroad," he added.

Balkan states have some of the lowest density rates of doctors in Europe, according to available data from the World Health Organization (WHO). Albania is the worst off, with only 1.2 physicians per 1,000 inhabitants, followed by Bosnia and Romania with 2 and 2.2 respectively, the WHO says. The number of nurses in Bulgaria, where they have recently protested being overworked and underpaid, has been slashed in half over the past 30 years.

There are also severe staff shortages in impoverished Kosovo, where many residents normally travel to neighboring countries for better treatment - an option no longer available with borders shut. "The situation is alarming, we must not hide it," said Blerim Sylja, the president of Kosovo's health unions, who estimates the sector lacks some 5,000 medical professionals. —AFP

over the world to prevent the pandemic's spread. It headed back to Punta Arenas in a bid to arrange for its more than 1,200 passengers and almost 600 crew to take flights back to their home countries. "Despite previous confirmations that guests could disembark in Punta Arenas, Chile, for flights, we were not permitted to do so," Holland America said in a statement on its website. "No one has been off the ship since March 14 in Punta Arenas." The 42 showing flu-like symptoms are quarantined.

'Locals throwing rocks'

"We heard that one ship that managed to dock at Punta Arenas was greeted by locals throwing rocks!" Bates, who boarded the Zaandam in Buenos Aires in a group of 20 Australians, said on Facebook. The ship sailed to Valparaiso in Chile where it remained at anchor last Friday to Saturday while taking on fuel, provisions and medication before continuing to San Antonio. Rear Admiral Yerko Marcic, the head of Chile's national defense at Valparaiso port, said eight Chileans were allowed to disembark, along with two French people for humanitarian reasons because "they had a high risk chronic illness and their medication was not going to last until the ship reached land."

There are more than 100 French passengers aboard. The ship has asked all passengers to remain in their rooms "out of an abundance of cau-

peak in one of Europe's poorest corners. Since the first case of COVID-19 was detected in the region one month ago, some 25 people have died and known infections have increased to more than 2,000 - a likely underestimation given limited testing. Should the Balkans follow the steep curve playing out in places like Italy and Spain, doctors warn that underfunded healthcare systems will be pushed to the brink.

The region is already afflicted by a brain drain crisis, with tens of thousands of people - including doctors and nurses - moving abroad every year, lured by better wages and less corruption in the West. In North Macedonia, up to half of medical school students annually pack their bags after graduation and head for countries like Germany, said Nikola Brzanov, a 38-year-old emergency room doctor, who leads an organization of young medical pro-

International

Indonesia's health system on the brink as coronavirus surge looms

Country's virus deaths highest in SE Asia; medical facilities already strained

JAKARTA: Indonesia has a significant deficit in hospital beds, medical staff and intensive care facilities as health experts warn that it is primed to become a new epicenter of the coronavirus pandemic, according to data reviewed by Reuters. Health experts say Indonesia faces a surge in coronavirus cases after a slow government response masked the scale of the outbreak in the world's fourth most populous country.

Indonesia has recorded 686 cases but the data is seen as understating the scale of infections because of a low rate of testing and a high mortality rate. Indonesia has reported 55 deaths, the highest in Southeast Asia.

A study by the London-based Centre for Mathematical Modelling of Infectious Diseases released on Monday estimates that as few as 2 percent of Indonesia's coronavirus infections have been reported. That would bring the true number to as many as 34,300, which is more than Iran.

Other modellers are projecting that cases could rise to as many as 5 million in the capital, Jakarta, by the end of April under a worst-case scenario. "We have lost control, it has already spread everywhere," Ascobati Gani, a public health economist told Reuters. "Maybe we will follow Wuhan or Italy. I think we are in the range of that". The government says the impact of the virus will not be that severe.

"We won't be like that," said Achmad Yurianto, a senior health ministry official, referring to comparisons with outbreaks in Italy and China. "What's im-

portant is that we rally the people ... they have to keep their distance."

Doctor dying

Indonesia's health system compares poorly with those in other countries hit hard by the virus. The country of more than 260 million people has 321,544 hospital beds, according to health ministry data. That is about 12 beds per 10,000 people. South Korea has 115 per 10,000 people, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

In 2017, the WHO found Indonesia had four doctors per 10,000 people. Italy had 10 times more, on a per capita basis. South Korea has six times more doctors. Yurianto said with proper social distancing measures there should not be a need for a large number of additional beds and that medical staffing was sufficient to tackle the virus.

However, Budi Waryanto, an epidemiologist from the University of Indonesia, told Reuters: "The hospitals are not ready to support the potential cases. Treatment will be limited." Although only hundreds of people have been hospitalized for coronavirus, doctors told Reuters the health system was already under strain. Many health staff lack protective equipment, with one doctor telling Reuters how she had to wear a raincoat because there were no coveralls available.

In a sign of poor infection controls in hospitals and clinics, eight doctors and one nurse have died from the coronavirus, according to the Indonesian Doctors As-



Indonesian medical staff take part in a mass test for the COVID-19 coronavirus at Patriot stadium in Bekasi, West Java yesterday. — AFP

sociation. In Italy, where there have been 6,077 coronavirus deaths, 23 doctors have died.

'We bring our own masks'

Staff at one hospital on the outskirts of Jakarta had threatened not to come to work on Tuesday because of a lack of protective equipment, another doctor told Reuters. "We bring our own masks, our own suits that may not be of standard quality," the doctor told Reuters, asking not to be identified because of the sensitivity of the matter.

"My friends, one by one, catch the virus," he said,

holding back tears. The government said this week it had sourced 175,000 new sets of protective equipment for medical staff that would be distributed across the country. A new emergency hospital has been opened in Jakarta with an eventual capacity to treat up to 24,000 patients. Doctors and medical staff have been promised bonuses and 500,000 rapid testing kits have arrived from China. Indonesia's health system is highly decentralized, making it hard for the central government to coordinate its response across a sprawling archipelago of some 19,000 islands spanning 5,100 km. — Reuters

“We bring our own masks”

Hubei lifts curbs as China reports no new virus cases

BEIJING: China lifted tough restrictions on the province at the epicentre of the coronavirus outbreak yesterday after a months-long lockdown as the country reported no new domestic cases. But there were another 47 imported infections from overseas, the National Health Commission said, as the number of cases brought into the country continued to swell. In total, 474 imported infections have been diagnosed in China - mostly Chinese nationals returning home according to the foreign ministry.

Four more people died, health officials said yesterday, three in central Hubei province where the virus first emerged late last year. China announced Tuesday that the lockdown would be

lifted on more than 50 million people in Hubei, with residents now allowed to leave if healthy, with some airports and train stations opening. The city of Wuhan - the initial epicentre of the outbreak - will allow residents to leave from April 8.

Hubei ordered the shutdown in January but had been gradually easing rules and permitting people to move about within the province and return to work over recent days. Schools remain closed, however. There have been more than 81,200 cases of COVID-19 in China and 3,281 deaths from the virus. New cases have slowed dramatically over the last month.

But as nations globally struggle to contain the pandemic, surging numbers of imported cases in China are fuelling anxiety about a possible second wave of infections just as the country seems to be bringing its outbreak under control. Many cities have brought in tough rules to quarantine arrivals, and all Beijing-bound international flights are being diverted to other urban centres where passengers are screened for the virus. — AFP



HANGZHOU, China: This photo taken on Tuesday shows a visitor taking a selfie with a security guard wearing an augmented reality headset used to measure a visitor's body temperature at a park. — AFP

India bans export of key malaria drug

NEW DELHI: The Indian government said yesterday that it is banning the export of hydroxychloroquine and formulations made from the medication, as experts test the efficacy of the drug in helping treat patients infected with COVID-19. There are currently no approved treatments, or preventive vaccines for COVID-19, the highly contagious, sometimes deadly respiratory illness caused by the new coronavirus. Researchers are studying existing treatments and working on experimental ones, but most current patients receive only supportive care such as breathing assistance.

Hydroxychloroquine, a malaria drug, is among the medications that are being tested, as a potential treatment for patients with the disease. Earlier this week, the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP), which maintains a list of drug shortages, said hydroxychloroquine was in shortage. "Chloroquine has demonstrated tox-

icity in certain patients," Dinesh Dua, chairman of the Pharmaceuticals Export Promotion Council of India, told Reuters. "You have to tread with caution because there is no comprehensive data to prove it works."

The group said India faced no shortages of the drug but they warned companies were facing acute shortages of staff to run operations. Late on Tuesday, India ordered a 21-day lockdown of its 1.3 billion people to try to protect the world's second most populous country from the fast-spreading coronavirus.

"It is impossible to maintain operations due to lockdown, because employees don't want to come," Dua said. India has already banned export of all ventilators and sanitizers and personal protection equipment such as masks and clothing to contain the outbreak that has so far infected more than 550 people and claimed close to a dozen lives in the country.

The ban comes after India, the world's largest supplier of generic drugs, this month restricted the export of 26 pharmaceutical ingredients and the medicines made from them, including Paracetamol, a common pain reliever also sold as acetaminophen, as the coronavirus outbreak plays havoc with supply chains. Some of those restrictions have since been relaxed. — Reuters

India's temple economy hit by coronavirus

CHENNAI: Indian shopkeeper Purab Gathani should be gearing up for his busiest time of year selling incense for the spring festival season, when crowds of worshippers usually throng Hindu temples.

Instead Gathani, whose family has sold Hindu prayer items for three generations, is looking at major losses as the coronavirus outbreak forces the country of 1.3 billion people into lockdown and places of worship shut down. "I never imagined we would close our shop on the eve of a festival," said Gathani, owner of a store in the western city of Mumbai, which yesterday celebrated the Gudi Padwa festival that marks the start of the Hindu year in the area.

"For the first time, there will be no rush at my store before Gudi Padwa and I am so shocked that I have not been able to even comprehend how it will impact my business in the coming months." Tens of thousands of people work at the bottom of India's so-called temple economy, which is worth an estimated \$40 billion and includes people selling everything from flowers to oil lamps to images of Hindu gods.

The vast majority form part of the informal sector that makes up about 90 percent of India's total workforce, meaning they are not protected by labor laws. Their livelihoods are at risk from a complete three-week shutdown imposed by the government on Tuesday to stem the spread of the coronavirus after the deaths of nine people.

Pradeep Chakravarthi conducts heritage tours in the southern India state of Tamil



MUMBAI: General view of Mumbai's skyline during the first day of a 21-day government-imposed nationwide lockdown as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 coronavirus yesterday. — AFP

Nadu, home to 44,000 temples, many of them centuries old and at the heart of local communities.

He said the economies that surround them had grown in recent decades, warning of a major hit to people's livelihoods as they were closed. "Even the number of flower sellers have increased, besides more eateries, hotels offering rooms to pilgrims, trinket sellers and of course prayer stores," Chakravarthi told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "Most of them are in the informal sector and will bear the brunt of this lockdown."

'Keep the faith'

V Subramanian, secretary of Jankalyan, a spiritual group that organizes prayers and provides aid in disasters, said the shutdown could not have come at a worse time as mil-

lions prepare for the spring festival season that begins with new year.

"You know the people working outside temples, particularly the smaller ones, are not millionaires," he said. "Certain families depend only on the temple for their livelihood. For many women, in particular, who sell flowers and oil lamps outside temples, the lockdown means no income. And the timing is terrible because festivals are around the corner."

Pranali Ravindra Ubale, 29, who works in a technology firm in Mumbai, was gearing up for a quieter celebration of Gudi Padwa than usual.

In other years she would buy colors for the traditional rangoli decorations and sweets to wrap in a red sari and hang at the door along with mango leaves, but this year none of that was possible. — Reuters

Bangladesh to free jailed leader Zia

DHAKA: The Bangladesh government said it was freeing opposition leader Khaleda Zia from jail on Tuesday for six months so she can get medical treatment. Law and Justice Minister Anisul Huq said the move came after a brother and sister of Zia—who has been in prison for two years—appealed to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to let her arch-rival fly to London for treatment.

Hasina and Zia are bitter rivals whose families have dominated Bangladesh's politics since independence in 1971.

Huq said, however, the 74-year-old Zia would not be allowed to go to another country.

"On the basis of the application and having been directed by the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Begum Khaleda Zia's conviction has been suspended," Huq told AFP. She is freed "on condition that she remains in her Dhaka residence to receive treatment and does not go abroad".

There was no immediate comment from Zia's family or her Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).



DHAKA: This picture shows Samin Sharar, 9, playing on the rooftop of his building in Dhaka, as he avoids going out due to fears over the COVID-19 novel coronavirus. — AFP

Sentenced to 10 years in jail on graft charges, Zia also faces nearly three dozen other outstanding cases. The BNP says the charges are politically motivated to keep her out of politics. Her lawyers have had repeated bail applications rejected. They have argued that she could die in prison without proper treatment. A recent leaked medical report on Zia's health said her rheumatoid arthritis was becoming increasingly serious. She has already had two knee replacement operations.

"As a result of combined active disease

and accompanied damage she is, at present, at a crippled state and largely dependent on assistance for her day-to-day activities," the report said. Hasina took over as prime minister from Zia in 2009 and has ruled since.

The United States, which has warm relations with Bangladesh, said it welcomed the decision to free Zia and pointed to concerns about the spread of the novel coronavirus. The global pandemic "needs leadership that is compassionate and prioritizes national unity," Alice Wells, the top US diplomat for South Asia, wrote on Twitter. — AFP

Business

THURSDAY, MARCH 26, 2020

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WASHINGTON, DC: Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin (center) leaves the offices of Minority Leader Charles Schumer (D-NY) as negotiations continue into the night on a \$2 trillion economic stimulus in response to the coronavirus pandemic at the US Capitol on Tuesday in Washington, DC. — AFP

US Senate, W House agree on \$2tn stimulus

Asian shares ride Wall St surge as investors pin hopes on US package

WASHINGTON: The Senate and White House have reached agreement on a \$2 trillion stimulus package for the US economy and millions of Americans ravaged by the coronavirus crisis, top lawmakers said early yesterday.

"At last, we have a deal," Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said, hailing the massive "wartime level of investment into our nation" reached after five days of arduous and tense negotiations.

"We have a bipartisan agreement on the largest rescue package in American history," top Senate Democrat Chuck Schumer said shortly after McConnell spoke. "So many people are being put out of work through no fault of their own. They don't know what their future is going to be like, how are they going to pay the bills," Schumer added. "Well, we come to their rescue."

The Senate and House of Representatives still need to pass the legislation before sending it to President Donald Trump for his signature. McConnell said the Senate will vote on the measure later. The deal aims to buttress the teetering economy by giving roughly \$2 trillion to health facilities, businesses and ordinary Americans buckling under the strain of the coronavirus pandemic. The measure will put cash directly into the

hands of Americans hard hit by the crisis, provides grants to small businesses and hundreds of billions of dollars in loans for larger corporations including airlines, and expands unemployment benefits.

It will also inject some \$130 billion into what Schumer calls "a Marshall Plan for hospitals" and



Businesses buckling under virus pandemic

health care infrastructure, referring to the huge American aid program to rebuild Europe after World War II.

With viral outbreaks spreading coast to coast, hospitals have been in dire need of equipment like protective gear, intensive care beds and ventilators.

Friday, her managers had repeatedly declined staffers' pleas to work from home.

"Even if I am infected with the virus, I know the death rate for young people isn't very high, but I am very very scared that I might transfer it to family," she said on condition of anonymity, as she is not authorized to speak to the media. After a state government order, JPMorgan on Sunday asked its Bengaluru staff to "stay at home until further notice," according to a message to employees, reviewed by Reuters.

In some cases, companies must seek client permission before allowing employees to work on sensitive projects outside the office, a senior human resources executive at a top Indian IT firm said of working remotely. "These days the challenge is not really the technology, the challenge is the regulations, and, in case something goes wrong, who's going to take the responsibility," the person said on condition of anonymity.

Indian software services firms, led by Tata Consultancy Services and Infosys, gained prominence by giving Western clients low-cost solutions to routine computer problems. Over time, they assumed a major role at many global companies.

Three employees of mid-sized IT services firm Mphasis, in the western Indian city of Pune, said they were all being asked to come to the office until last Friday, even as some expressed concerns about working in close proximity with roughly 90 other people. Maharashtra state, where Pune is located, had imposed restrictions on private company employees going to offices in an effort to curb the spread of the virus. But it made exemptions for essential services including some IT companies. — Reuters

US stocks had already surged Tuesday on expectations of an agreement. The agreement followed multiple failed attempts to advance a Republican-led proposal, and pressure had soared to swiftly reach a compromise that provides relief for hundreds of millions of Americans. President Donald Trump called for an immediate resolution to the stalemate.

'Stop negotiating'

Democrats rejected the original package, arguing it put corporations ahead of workers, including health professionals on the front lines of the battle against a pandemic that has infected 55,000 and killed nearly 800 in the US alone. As the hours ticked away Tuesday, several lawmakers voiced their anxiety.

"Pass the damn bill. Stop negotiating. Enough is enough," a visibly angry Republican Senator Lindsey Graham said on the floor, after accusing Democrats of "nickel and diming at a time people are dying." Any relief package that passes the Senate will need to clear the Democratic-led House too before going to Trump. Speaker Nancy Pelosi unveiled a more generous, roughly \$2.5 trillion counterproposal that included ambitious elements like guaranteed paid and family medical leave, student loan forgiveness and

oversight of the \$500 billion earmarked for corporations. But she signalled the House may simply take up the Senate bill and try to pass it.

"Much of what we have in our bill is reflected in this supposed agreement," Pelosi said. According to Schumer, the compromise legislation includes an oversight mechanism for the company loans, and expanded unemployment provisions for workers laid off or sickened during the pandemic.

"Every American worker who is laid off will have their salary remunerated by the federal government, Schumer said. Pelosi suggested the measure might even pass the House by unanimous consent. But getting 435 lawmakers to swallow a gargantuan rescue package without debate could be an uphill proposition in a sharply divided chamber.

Asian shares gained yesterday in the wake of Wall Street's massive rebound as US senators and Trump administration officials reached an agreement on a giant economic stimulus bill to alleviate the economic impact of the coronavirus outbreak. European benchmark stock futures rose more than 1 percent in early trade but US stock futures were down 1 percent as the news about the deal invited profit-taking after big gains the previous day. — Agencies

India's outsourcing industry grapples with new scenario

NEW DELHI/BENGALURU: As the coronavirus pandemic pushes India into a lockdown, the call centers and IT services firms that function as the world's back office are struggling to piece together work-from-home solutions and other business-continuity plans.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday ordered 1.3 billion Indians to stay at home for 21 days to stem the spread of SARS-CoV-2, following earlier lockdown orders in many Indian cities and states. As of Tuesday, India had reported over 500 cases of the virus and nine deaths. Many of the companies that provide business services such as call centers, information technology services and business process automation were not prepared for work-for-home arrangements, according to interviews with more than a dozen employees of several companies.

That raises questions about whether one of India's showpiece industries can function smoothly amid the coronavirus crisis. "The industry has been scrambling to set up its own business continuity plan," said R. Chandrashekhar, a retired federal government official and a former president of India's IT services lobby group, NASSCOM.

In the southern tech hub of Bengaluru, an employee working at a JPMorgan call centre said that until last

Currency black market re-emerges in Egypt

CAIRO: A small black market in the Egyptian pound has re-emerged in the last few days as the coronavirus takes a toll on the country's main sources of foreign currency, three bankers and businessmen said on Monday. Some unofficial trades were taking place at 16.15 pounds to the dollar, compared to the 15.75 pounds offered by currency exchange bureaus and banks, they said.

Egypt has so far registered 327 cases of the respiratory disease caused by the virus, including 14 deaths, the health ministry said on Sunday. The government last week suspended almost all commercial flights in an bid to control the spread, devastating the vital tourism industry that earned the country \$12.5 billion in 2019. The number of container ships passing through the Suez canal fell by 7.3 percent in February, an indication the coronavirus is dampening world trade, Al Mal reported on Monday.

A brisk carry trade in Egyptian treasury bills has slowed in the last few weeks, economists say, with foreign investors pulling dollars out of Egypt. Still, with \$45.51 billion in foreign reserves as of end-February, Egypt has a strong armory to support the currency - which has lost little value on official markets since the outbreak compared to currencies of other emerging

market countries such as Russia, Turkey and South Africa.

Nacem Brokerage said in a note on Monday that the dollar was trading at 16.10-16.15 pounds in the parallel market, but that trade was very thin as importers postpone orders. "Banks have begun rationing their FX inventories (prioritizing on the imports of necessities) adjusting to the drop in inflows from tourism and hot money outflows," the note said.

"With interbank (foreign exchange) liquidity expected to dry up further in the coming months, we expect the (central bank) to intermittently plug the deficit by selling dollars to the banks," Nacem said, adding that it expected foreign reserves to decline by \$1-1.5 billion a month. On Tuesday, Nacem issued a correction of its note saying there was no parallel currency market. The central bank closely manages the currency, sometimes putting pressure on banks not to let it weaken.

A licensed money changer in downtown Cairo said on Monday that retail trade had ground to a near halt in the last few weeks, with little demand for either dollars or pounds. "The government has some tools to deal with this," said an Egyptian banker at a state bank who asked not to be named.

One step already taken was for banks to issue certificates of deposit (CDs) for Egyptian pound accounts, with a 15 percent guaranteed rate of interest over a fixed period to deter people from switching to dollar holdings, he said. Another investment banker said colleagues had asked a state bank for dollars as a test. They were "asked to wait for 48 hours but were granted what they requested, but not before some negotiations regarding the quantity," he said. — Reuters

Business

With economy sinking, Trump's own business empire is in peril

President is watching another financial drama

WASHINGTON: As if presiding over the threatened destruction of the US economy by the coronavirus pandemic is not enough, President Donald Trump is watching another financial drama: the Trump Organization hotel, golf course and real estate business that made him a billionaire.

His five-star US and Canada hotels with more than 2,200 rooms are mostly empty, his golf courses in the United States, Scotland and Ireland are under pressure to close, and his cherished "Southern White House"—the beach-front Mar-a-Lago club in Palm Beach, Florida is shuttered.

Like other hotels around the country, Trump's have been forced to lay off most workers and face the fact that the \$435 million in revenues that the Trump Organization reported in 2018 is likely to plummet this year. How severe that would be to a family-controlled business notoriously untransparent about its finances is unknown.

And it has raised questions over whether Trump's concerns about his own company are shaping his response to the crisis: whether part of the giant \$2 trillion economic rescue plan in Congress will be used to prop up his hotel and resort businesses, and whether his push for a quick end to the coronavirus lockdown is to save the company.

"Our country—it's not built to shut down,"

Trump said Tuesday, calling for an end to restrictions by the second week of April. "You can destroy a country this way by closing it down."

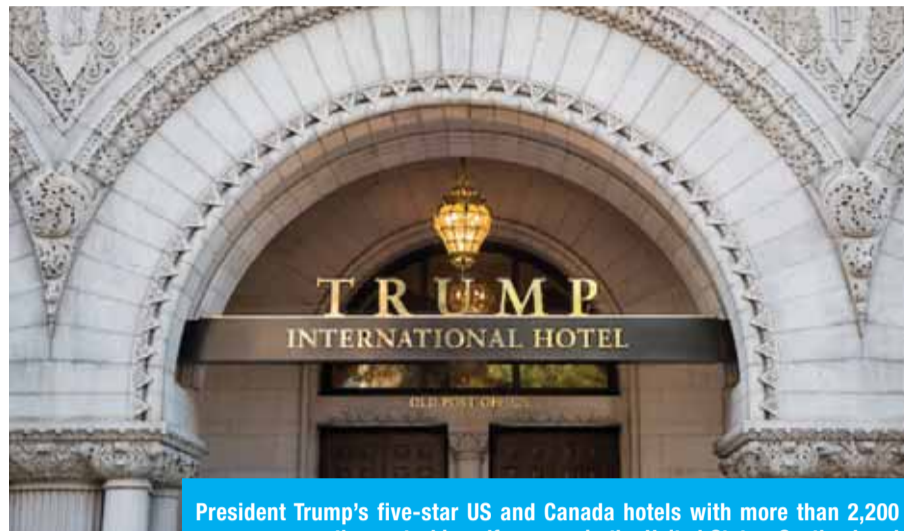
'It's hurting me'

Neither Trump nor his sons who oversee the company have detailed the financial damage they face. But it is clear: the name-plate hotels in New York, Washington, Chicago, Las Vegas, Vancouver and Hawaii are virtually empty.

Likewise, his golf resorts are being ordered to lock up, even in remote Scotland. On Monday the Scottish Golf organization said it anticipates a shutdown order and urged "all golfers in Scotland refrain from golfing until further notice." "It's hurting me and it's hurting Hilton and it's hurting all of the great hotel chains all over the world," Trump said Saturday.

Yet the Trump Organization, for vanity or other reasons, insists on keeping them open. "The hotel is open, the restaurants are closed, the spa is closed, the pool is closed," a receptionist at the Trump International Hotel & Tower on Central Park in New York told AFP, not giving her name.

"There's a Whole Foods across the street. We can get something for you and bring it to your room," she suggested. John Boardman, head of the Washington branch of the Unite Here labor union, said the



President Trump's five-star US and Canada hotels with more than 2,200 rooms are mostly empty, his golf courses in the United States, Scotland and Ireland are under pressure to close.—AFP

Trump International in Washington was still operating despite sweeping staff layoffs.

"It doesn't make sense for them to stay open. The hotel has like three percent occupancy," said Boardman. "He may not be shutting it down just to be able to say they are still operating."

Profiteering allegations

Since entering office, Trump has fended off pressure and lawsuits that alleged he

was profiting from his properties while president. Business executives, diplomats and Middle Eastern kings seeking his favor stayed at his hotels, especially the Trump International just blocks from the White House.

The Washington Post has reported on the huge amounts Saudis have paid to book up Trump hotel wings, and the high rates he charges his own Secret Service contingent when he travels to his own properties,

including tens of thousands of dollars for golf carts. Several lawsuits have accused him of profiteering from his office—against the US constitution's "emoluments" clause—but none have stuck.

'It's one of those things'

But now much of that is moot, with the spread of COVID-19 forcing the country's hotel industry into crisis. Last week the industry, which provides jobs for some eight million people, asked the White House for \$150 billion in support. Many are now wondering whether part of the bailout—a proposed \$500 billion discretionary fund to support businesses that will be run by the US Treasury without public reporting—will be deployed to aid Trump's hotels along with the rest of the industry.

"Now more than ever, it is crucial that the American people know that the president is acting in the public's best interest and not for his own personal financial gain," Elizabeth Wydra, president of the Constitutional Accountability Center, told AFP. Asked Saturday if he would benefit from a bailout, Trump replied: "I don't know." "I just don't know what the government assistance would be for what I have. I have hotels. Everybody knew I had hotels when I got elected. They knew I was a successful person when I got elected. So it's one of those things," he said.—AFP



German farmers are concerned that the restrictions imposed to fight coronavirus will mean they struggle to find the migrant workers they need to bring in their asparagus crops.—AFP

As borders shut, farmers sound alarm in Europe

BEELITZ OT KLAISTOW, Germany: Whether it's served with butter and ham, drowned in hollandaise sauce or topped with a fried egg, nothing says spring in Germany like asparagus.

But this year, the cherished vegetable may be a rare sight on dining tables as many of the foreign seasonal workers who would usually harvest the crop are unable to enter the country because of travel bans imposed over the coronavirus. "The situation is very tense for us farmers," says Thomas Syring, who runs a farm in Beelitz, a town in the state of Brandenburg known for its cultivation of white asparagus.

Syring is just one of hundreds of farmers faced with the threat that his crops may be left rotting in the fields because of a serious shortage of workers. With warmer weather looming, farmers across Europe are scrambling for ways to fill the manpower gap as travel restrictions imposed to halt COVID-19 contagion tighten.

Tens of thousands needed

During a normal season, Syring's farm employs about 60 workers from Romania, Poland and Bulgaria. At present, only 10 have arrived. "At the moment it is cold again, it will slow down the growth of the asparagus. But in a week, at the latest, the asparagus will come out of the ground and continue to grow," he warns at his farm, where rows upon rows of asparagus are waiting beneath sheets of white plastic to keep the soil warm.

Juergen Jakob of Beelitzer Spargel, an association for asparagus farmers in Beelitz, says only half of the 5,000 seasonal workers required in the region have arrived so far this year.

"There is a need for quick clarification on how workers from Romania and Poland in particular can enter Germany," says Udo Hemmerling, general secretary of the German Farmers' Association.

Around 300,000 seasonal workers come to Germany each year, mainly

from Poland and Romania, to help with fruit and vegetable harvests, according to Hemmerling. In Austria, which is facing a manpower shortage of 5,000 to help in fruit and vegetable farms, the ministry has set up a website to get people in other sectors to sign up and help. And in Switzerland, fears are growing that only a fraction of the 33,000 seasonal workers required annually will be available this year.

Double pay

German agriculture minister Julia Klöckner said Europe's biggest economy requires "30,000 seasonal workers in March alone, with the number rising to 85,000 in May". She has suggested filling some of the vacancies with workers who have suddenly found themselves unemployed because of the coronavirus crisis.

Measures agreed by the cabinet on Monday to help farmers include allowing the workers that are available to work for longer, and easing red tape around hiring temporary workers from other sectors.

But the farmers still prefer to bring in experienced farmhands from abroad.

With land transit routes blocked, some have resorted to flying workers in on chartered flights, but even though they have valid work permits, some are still not being allowed in. Others are offering better deals to entice workers. "For asparagus, our partners are offering to double salaries, as well as very good conditions on accommodation and catering to assure workers that they won't need to go out," says Emese Molnar, who runs a Romanian company that sends seasonal workers to countries including Germany and the Netherlands.

But beyond border barriers, some are simply worried about travelling.

"If they're too afraid to leave their home, how can they go abroad?" asked Simona, a Romanian seasonal labor agent. For Beelitz's Jakob, time might be running out.

"We are now very close to the asparagus harvest, but if we do not have enough harvest workers, we will not be able to harvest the whole crop," he warns. Bringing in workers from other sectors won't solve the problem because of the time it takes to train them. "Perhaps they will have learned how to do it by the end of the asparagus season, but that doesn't help us very much," Jakob says.—AFP

Facebook revenue slips as usage leaps during virus

SAN FRANCISCO: Facebook on Tuesday said the coronavirus pandemic has users flocking to its services while it undermines ad revenue on which the world's biggest social network depends. Online voice and video calls at Facebook-owned Messenger and WhatsApp have more than doubled in places hit hard by the new coronavirus, according to a post by vice president of analytics Alex Schultz and Jay Parikh, vice president of engineering. "As the pandemic expands and more people practice physically distancing themselves from one another, this has also meant that many more people are using our apps," Parikh and Schultz said.

Much of the increased use has been at Facebook's free messaging services which don't generate ad revenue, according to the executives. "We don't monetize many of the services where we're seeing increased engagement, and we've seen a weakening in our ads business in countries taking aggressive actions to reduce the spread of COVID-19," Parikh and Schultz said.

Soaring use at Facebook's "family" of services and across the internet industry have been unprecedented, they added. Facebook, which has more than two billion users, is among numerous firms expected to take a hit from the crisis, which has already altered many consumer and online habits. Online advertising is expected to be affected by the pandemic as many marketing campaigns are cut back, and ad targeting is thrown into chaos. Twitter on Monday dialed back its earnings expectations for the current quarter, citing the pandemic's impact on its advertising revenue, even though the service has become a hub of conversation about the crisis.

Twitter withdrew an earlier forecast for the first quarter of 2020 and now expects an operating loss along with declining revenues.—AFP

Economic fears as Africa escalates virus response

DAKAR: African nations have ordered curfews and lockdowns in response to the growing coronavirus epidemic, raising fears of turmoil for low-income workers and cash-strapped governments across the continent. Cases have risen across the world's poorest continent over the past week to a total of 2,137 and 62 deaths, according to an AFP tally, prompting countries to enact strict control measures.

South Africa, the continent's most developed economy—which at 554 cases has Africa's largest outbreak—on Monday announced a nationwide lockdown.

"Without decisive action, the number of people infected will rapidly increase... to hundreds of thousands," South African President Cyril Ramaphosa said at the time.

There are fears that weak health infrastructure in Africa will leave the continent particularly exposed to an outbreak on the scale of virus-stricken Europe. Other countries are following suit with similar measures. More are expected to be announced in the coming days.

On Monday, Senegal and Ivory Coast both declared states of emergency and ordered

night-time curfews. Ivory Coast on Tuesday said it had recorded 73 coronavirus cases and would lock areas down progressively, depending on how the virus spreads. Senegal has recorded 86 coronavirus cases, its health ministry said on Tuesday.

Ivory Coast PM in self-isolation
In a sign of coronavirus' increasing reach, Ivory Coast's Prime Minister Amadou Gon Coulibaly said on Twitter on Tuesday that he



LESOTHO: A queue of cars are seen at the Maseru Bridge border post between Lesotho and South Africa yesterday as residents and retailers of Lesotho head to South Africa to stock up on groceries and other essential goods after South African President Cyril Ramaphosa announced a 21-day national lockdown for South Africa.—AFP

Paraguay closes borders, Avianca grounds planes

MONTEVIDEO, Uruguay: Paraguay closed its borders until the end of the week while Latin America's second-largest airline grounded its commercial services on Tuesday. The Galapagos Islands also recorded their first cases of the new coronavirus and Mexico upped its outbreak response as Latin American countries continued to roll out measures to contain the COVID-19 disease.

Paraguay

President Mario Abdo Benitez closed the country's borders until Sunday following a second death from COVID-19. "People can only leave, not enter," said Interior Minister Euclides Acevedo, adding that Paraguayans and residents were exempt but would face quarantine in military barracks upon return.

Commercial airlines will not be allowed to land at Paraguayan airports during the timeframe.

Colombia

Avianca, the second-largest airline in Latin America, said it was suspending all passenger operations. Last week it had grounded international flights but was continuing to provide domestic services. The measure came after Colombia President Ivan Duque closed the country's airspace as the number of confirmed cases there rose to more than 300, with three dead. Avianca's 10 freight planes will continue to operate but 142 passenger planes have been grounded.

Mexico

Hugo Lopez-Gatell Ramirez, under-secretary of health prevention and promotion, said the country was entering "phase two" of its coronavirus approach,

moving from containment to "mitigation." The decision came after Mexico's confirmed cases rose to 367, five percent of which have come from domestic transmission.

Lopez-Gatell said the new measures would help "reduce the speed of propagation" of the virus.

Ecuador

Galapagos Islands government authorities said four people on the Ecuadorian archipelago had tested positive for the virus. All four had returned to the islands from the port of Guayaquil, the worst affected city in Ecuador with more than half of the country's 1,000 confirmed cases.

A week ago, the government ordered a total ban on visitors to the islands—which lie more than 900 kilometers (560 miles) west of Ecuador's coast—where measures were already in place to restrict the movement of people. The infected individuals will undergo health protocols before being transferred to the mainland, the regional government said.

Brazil

The Sao Paulo stock exchange surged alongside world markets amidst renewed optimism regarding plans to fight the coronavirus pandemic. The Ibovespa index closed up nearly 10 percent having fallen just over five percent on Monday. "It's still too early to draw any conclusions, but we are seeing less volatility" than last week, said trading analyst Thiago Salomao of brokerage firm Rico Investimentos. The Brazilian real also strengthened 1.1 percent, to 5.08 to the dollar.

Chile

A wild puma was captured after it was found wandering around the deserted center of Santiago in search of food, Chilean authorities said. The one-year-old, 35-kilogram (77-pound) feline came down from the nearby surrounding hills to take advantage of a nighttime curfew due to the virus outbreak.—AFP

Business

BOJ sees deeper economic pain, even after emergency easing

Some in BOJ say virus pushing economy into stagnation



TOKYO: A pedestrian walks past a quotation board displaying the share price numbers for early trading on the Tokyo Stock Exchange in Tokyo yesterday. Tokyo stocks opened higher yesterday supported by a weak yen, continuing to buck the global downturn due to the mounting economic toll from the coronavirus. —AFP

TOKYO: The coronavirus pandemic could plunge Japan into deep economic stagnation, the country's central bankers warned at last week's emergency monetary policy meeting with one seeing room for more stimulus, a summary of their discussion showed yesterday.

The Bank of Japan expanded monetary stimulus in an unscheduled policy meeting on March 16 to ease corporate funding strains and calm financial markets jolted by the health crisis. A summary of opinions expressed at last week's rate review showed the deep concern shared among the nine-member board over the huge blow the virus outbreak could inflict on an economy, already reeling from last year's sales tax hike.

"Japan's economy may continue to stagnate even after overseas economies recover, as the impact of the virus could be enormous," one board member was quoted as

saying. "I'm doubtful of the view Japan's economy will stage a strong rebound once the virus is contained," another opinion in the summary showed.

One board member said the BOJ can continue to respond flexibly to risks, through measures such as another emergency policy meeting or ramping up government bond purchases, as recession fears heighten, the summary showed. The summary, typically released about a week after the BOJ's policy meeting, does not disclose the identity of the board member who made the comments.

The pandemic has become a global economic crisis with travel restrictions, event cancellations and supply chain disruptions raising the chance Japan will slip into recession, keeping policymakers under pressure to deploy huge fiscal and monetary stimulus.

Confirmed coronavirus cases around the world exceeded 377,000 across 194 countries and territories as of early Tuesday, according to a Reuters tally, more than 16,500 of them fatal.

With the March monetary easing intended as a stop-gap move to address immediate strains in markets, the BOJ will focus more on how to address the economic fallout from the virus when it next meets for a rate review on April 27-28. A senior ruling party lawmaker yesterday called on the government to compile a record stimulus that would be bigger than the 57-trillion-yen (\$514 billion) package deployed during the global financial crisis. The BOJ also stands ready to expand stimulus again in April if the pandemic leads to cuts in jobs and capital expenditure big enough to derail prospects of an economic recovery, sources have told Reuters. — Reuters

Flipkart suspends services; India's online services hit

NEW DELHI: Walmart Inc's Flipkart has suspended services, a notice on the Indian e-commerce firm's website said yesterday, as India began a 21-day lockdown to fight the spread of the coronavirus pandemic.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi ordered the lockdown from Tuesday midnight, but a federal government advisory suggested exempting e-commerce deliveries of essentials such as food and medical equipment in addition to grocery stores and banks.

Flipkart, whose services include grocery deliveries, did not say how long the suspension would last.

"Our promise is that we will be back to serve you, as soon as possible," the notice said.

Amazon India's pantry service that delivers groceries was also not available in several cities. It has not said, however that it is suspending pantry services, only that it will halt orders for non-essential products to priori-

tize customers' critical needs. Modi's announcement led to long queues at grocery stores in cities such as New Delhi and Mumbai as customers began panic buying before the ban came into effect.

Even before Modi's announcement, several cities across India had begun imposing curfews though essential services were allowed. But different state orders created confusion and disrupted online deliveries, including grocery supplies. Alibaba-backed online grocer BigBasket said its services had been impacted.

"We are working with the local authorities for the passes and permits that allow movement of personnel and vehicles involved," BigBasket said in a statement.

The company also said it was booked for the next seven days in almost all the cities it operated in, highlighting stockpiling by customers. — Reuters

Nike's China sales affected

NEW YORK: Nike's quarterly profits dropped following a rare sales decline in China due to the coronavirus outbreak, a hit offset somewhat by higher online sales in that market, the company announced Tuesday. The sporting goods giant, which had garnered double-digit revenue growth in China for 22 straight quarters, suffered a five percent drop in sales in the country in the quarter ending February 29, falling to \$1.5 billion. During the peak of the COVID-19 crisis in China, 75 percent of Nike-owned stores were closed in the country, but that hit was blunted by a 30 percent jump in digital sales, the company said. With the virus waning in the country where it first appeared, the company said nearly 80 percent of its Nike and affiliated stores in China are currently open. However, on March 16 Nike shuttered all its Nike-owned stores outside China, Japan and Korea due to coronavirus. The company, which has extensive marketing and sponsorship ventures in pro sports, also is navigating a marketing environment in which professional sports leagues have been suspended and the Tokyo Olympic Games were postponed for a year. —AFP



Chinese consumers asked to spend amid signs of normalcy

BEIJING/SHANGHAI: Electronics stores, coffee chains and even local authorities in China are slashing prices and handing out millions of dollars' worth of discount coupons to kick start an economy battered by gradually easing, virus-fighting restrictions on movement. GOME Retail Holdings Ltd and Suning.com Co Ltd plan to hand out over 620 million yuan (\$88 million) worth of vouchers, while Alibaba Group Holding Ltd's Alipay is giving away 10 million discount tokens for 10,000 retailers on its app. JD.com Inc said from today it will give out 1.5 billion yuan (\$212 million) worth of coupons for branded goods in categories including electronics.

Even the railway authority cut ticket prices yesterday by as much as 45 percent, while local governments such as those of Hebei, Zhejiang and Guangxi provinces are giving out vouchers for tourist attractions, cinemas and shops. "We've launched some discounted set offers to consumers in recent days, hoping to help consumers getting back to their normal life," a Pacific Coffee chain spokeswoman said, referring to a coffee-and-bun deal priced as low as 20 yuan (\$2.83).

The promotions reflect concern that the outbreak has depressed consumer appetite and could have a lingering impact, even as the number of new locally transmitted cases has dropped.

About 500 cinemas reopened over the weekend after being shut for almost two months but took in just 30,000 yuan (\$4,245) on Saturday, local media reported.

Retail sales in the world's second-largest economy shrank by a fifth in January-February from the same period a year earlier, government data showed, during which time China began taking dramatic measures to curb the spread of the virus, shutting transport links and asking millions of people to stay home. The government has loosened restrictions in recent weeks which is encouraging consumers to venture back into malls and restaurants, albeit amid concerns over job security and potential wage cuts brought about by a struggling economy.

"Trade, tourism catering and other services not only help to prop up an economy's growth, but also embody a city's vitality," financial magazine Yicai reported Zhang Jinghua, party secretary of Nanjing, as saying in early March, days before the eastern Chinese city announced it would give away 318 million yuan worth of shopping coupons in a lottery-style scheme.

He stressed the need to grasp the balance between epidemic prevention and rehabilitation and to create a safe and secure consumer environment. The city later said it believed its move boost consumption by nearly 10 million yuan in five days. — Reuters

EU finance ministers split on rescue plan

BRUSSELS: EU finance ministers failed to agree on crisis measures to help European countries withstand the economic shock of the coronavirus outbreak Tuesday, leaving it to leaders to break the logjam at a summit this week. The COVID-19 outbreak has brought the European economy to its knees and Italy, with the backing of France and Spain, wants a massive response from EU partners in a historic act of financial solidarity.

But northern countries, led by Germany and the Netherlands, are not in a hurry and believe a huge stimulus announced by the European Central Bank, backed by national spending, is adequate for now.

"We are committed to explore all possibilities necessary to support our economies to get through these difficult times," said Eurogroup chief Mario Centeno, who could not find a consensus after two hours of talks. "This discussion has just only started and more work is needed to get to the finish line," added Centeno, who is also Portugal's finance minister.

'Wrong at this time'

At the heart of the split is the deep unease among the northern and wealthier European nations about the financial discipline of their southern partners, especially since the dark days of the eurozone debt crisis. Countries like France, Spain and Italy have long called for a eurobond, that is in effect joint borrowing by the 19 members of the euro single currency, that could serve as the bedrock of a safer and more unified European economy.

Italy, backed by France, recently renewed the call by asking for EU-wide "corona bonds", but ahead of Tuesday's talks Germany angrily dismissed the idea as the return of the politically poisonous "eurobond" under another name. "I can only recommend that we don't hold a mock debate for ideological reasons, in which everyone digs out their preferred solution from five or 10 years ago," German Economy Minister Peter Altmaier said in Berlin.

"It's not about a fundamental change of strategy for ideological reasons. That would be wrong at this time and we won't go along with it," he added.

Given the acrimony, governments will spend the next days working towards agreeing on a more surgical approach that would tap into the eurozone's massive bailout war chest to help countries in need, especially Italy.

'Driving through the mist'

Controlled by the 19 finance ministers from the euro single currency bloc, the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) has over 400 billion euros (\$430 billion) in firepower and could raise more.

But the Netherlands said it was too early to burn cash from a fund that is one of the EU's most significant financial weapons after the ECB. "We have to be honest here. We are driving through the mist. We are unsure what is exactly ahead of us," said Dutch Finance Minister Wopke Hoekstra.

The ESM "is one of the most substantial things in our arsenal and it is invariable that we keep it for what it is designed for," he added. Designed in the debt crisis, the fund has the main purpose of rescuing countries that are shut out of the markets—which is not the case now.

But the ESM can also offer loan guarantees for countries that ask for it, though Italy, already under a pile of debt, is reluctant to do so, afraid of signalling to the markets that it has money problems.

ESM programs also come with demands to enact painful reforms, which Italy is reluctant to accept when what it actually wants is an act of friendship in a desperate moment.

A eurozone source said credit lines would likely be agreed in the end, but even that would be difficult. EU leaders are to meet today by videoconference. — AFP



STRASBOURG: Flags of European Union member states fly in front of the European Parliament building in Strasbourg. — Reuters

COVID-19 redraws battle lines on airline emissions

PARIS/BRUSSELS: European airlines crippled by the coronavirus have demanded lasting relief from environmental taxes - in a move that pits their immediate survival against longer-term emissions goals. The looming tax tussle underscores shifting environmental battle lines and a broader question for governments injecting billions into their afflicted economies: Should bailouts come before climate objectives or rather be used to advance them?

The airline sector has been fighting a losing battle against tax in Europe. Governments have imposed new levies to slow growth in traffic and emissions, while the European Union plans to begin taxing jet fuel. "This industry is going to have more taxes, not less taxes, and I think you all know it," top EU transport official Henrik Hololei told airline CEOs in Brussels this month.

"So you can indulge yourselves with a study of what it would be like if there were no taxes - but the reality is unfortunately much harsher." That reality is being put to the test.

Within days of the meeting, the pandemic had dramatically worsened, forcing airlines to suspend most flights, lay off

thousands of staff and seek government aid to avert collapse.

Besides public cash, airlines are pushing to defer or waive a swath of European taxes and duties. "After the crisis we hope governments will understand that the fragility of this industry is due to low margins and heavy cost of capital," the head of the International Air Transport Association (IATA) said.

"And that it is not economically and financially wise to increase taxation on a sector that is structurally fragile and financially weak," Alexandre de Juniac told reporters.

Bailout conditions

With airlines at the front of bailout queues, green advocates fear climate action may lose momentum, just as it did after the 2008 financial crisis. Collapsed oil prices also work against pricier aviation biofuels. Some are calling for aid to depend on emissions cuts.

"Public money should support the technologies of the future and not reinforce the mistakes of the past," said Andrew Murphy of Transport & Environment. The campaign group wants airlines to be forced to use more low-car-

bon fuel and pay tax on kerosene and international ticket sales, in return for bailouts. "Airlines calling for public support in bad times should accept they need to start paying taxes in good times," he said. US Democratic lawmakers have also proposed requiring airlines to cut emissions by 25 percent within 15 years and 50 percent by 2050 in return for \$40 billion in grants.

In Australia, any Qantas rescue would likely require faster progress on carbon, sources with knowledge of the matter told Reuters. The coronavirus shutdown is likely to result in a full-year decline in emissions from aviation and other industries. Some experts say that could dilute public support for climate action.

IATA said on Tuesday it now expects 2020 air traffic to fall by 38 percent before embarking on a recovery later this year. That could cut carbon dioxide emissions by several hundred million tonnes, based on earlier forecasts and data. Any "short-term blip" in emissions should not prevent governments from using coronavirus stimulus to achieve longer-term reductions, Fatih Birol, head of the International Energy Agency, said in a recent commentary. — Reuters

Smelling a rat: How rodents sniff out fake beggars

WASHINGTON: Like people, rats cooperate with one another and give food to those in need, but how can they be sure that other rats are being truthful about how hungry they are? The answer may lie in smell-based cues that signal a rat's appetite more reliably than its begging gestures and squeaks, a study said Tuesday.

The paper's lead author Karin Schneeberger of the University of Potsdam in Germany said she was interested in learning more about how social animals identify "cheaters" and freeloaders. She and her colleagues studied Norway rats (*Rattus norvegicus*), publishing their findings in the journal PLOS Biology.

Previous work has shown the rats share their food reciprocally, with the donation of what they deem high value food items, like bananas, more likely to elicit a gift in return than low value items, like carrots.

But the scientists believed the calls and gestures used by rats to solicit food might not always reflect their actual needs, allowing dishonest rodents to trick givers out of their hard earned gains. To test out the idea, they took rats that were either hungry from fasting overnight, or well-fed, and placed them in a separate room from the "focal" rat whose generosity they wanted to test.

Air from the rooms of the hungry or well-fed rats was pumped into the chamber of the focal rat. They found that the focal rats were much quicker to provide help — by pulling a food tray within reaching distance of another rat — when the air was

pumped from a hungry rat's room.

It took 16 focal rats an average of 29 seconds to provide help for hungry rats, compared to an average of 85 seconds to give help to the well-fed. The authors then analyzed the air around the rats and found seven different organic compounds that differed significantly in their abundance between hungry and satiated rats.

Good rat citizens

These might result from recently ingested food sources, the metabolic processes involved in digestion, or possibly even a pheromone that indicates hunger. Taken together, these signals form a "smell of hunger" for rats that serves as a reliable cue of need, said Schneeberger.

Apart from identifying freeloaders, the rats may be acting to reduce the suffering of others, she added. "It could be that they do that out of an emotional state — I don't really want to call it empathy because that's something that is very anthropomorphic," said Schneeberger. "But having somebody in distress next to yourself can cause stress in yourself too."

Rats could also be investing in a better rodent society that ultimately serves their own interests, just like humans do, she added. "Maybe when we are old and we need help crossing the street, then we are also very happy to live in a society where it generally is the rule that you help elderly people to cross the street. "So we try to keep the society as social as possible." — AFP



ALLAHABAD, INDIA: In this file photo taken on July 28, 2015 rats eat grains of puffed rice in Allahabad, India. — AFP

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These pictures taken on March 23, 2020 shows artist S.F., 16, spraypainting graffiti inspired by the COVID-19 on the roof of his apartment building in Athens.—AFP photos



Weinstein wants to postpone his civil case by two months

Harvey Weinstein wants to postpone his civil case by two months. The 68-year-old convicted rapist is being sued by actress Wedil David for sexually assaulting her in 2016, but his legal team have asked the judge for an eight-week extension "due to the current coronavirus crisis" that is sweeping across the globe. According to the court documents, obtained by TMZ.com, his lawyer has claimed there are several reasons why the former movie producer can't meet the deadline: including his recent conviction in his New York rape case, his forthcoming criminal case in Los Angeles and his declining health and on-going medical problems. It's thought Weinstein was one of the two

inmates at Wende Correctional Facility in New York to test positive to COVID-19 earlier this week, but his lawyer has said he won't be commenting on the speculation out of respect for his privacy rights. Despite this, the legal documents went on to suggest that Weinstein is an "at-risk individual" and added the current pandemic has been a "perfect storm for him" and this, in turn, warrants an extension of a deadline in his civil case to May 15. The judge is yet to make a decision on the appeal. Earlier this month, Weinstein was sentenced to 23 years in prison after he was found guilty of third-degree rape and a first-degree criminal sexual act. After his sentencing, he was rushed to Bellevue Hospital in Manhattan,

New York, after suffering a "dangerous" rise in blood pressure following the hearing. His spokesman Juda Engelmayr said recently: "His blood pressure spiked to a dangerous level and given his angioplasty last week, they brought him to Bellevue to be watched and monitored. He did not have another angioplasty." On March 4 he underwent an angioplasty - in which a tiny catheter is inserted into a vessel to help improve blood flow to the heart - before he was transferred to Rikers Island and held in the North Infirmiry Command ahead of his sentencing.

Braun feels protective over Bieber and Grande

Scooter Braun is very "protective" over Justin Bieber and Ariana Grande. The 38-year-old music mogul - who manages the two stars - has known them for a long time, and he sees them more as "family" than friends. He said: "I was talking to Alfredo Flores, and Alfredo was on the road with me and Justin for years as Justin's videographer and actually he's now on the road with Ariana. We were talking about how its become too normal for us that you get - I wouldn't say jaded - you don't realize, one concert you bring someone backstage ... but when you're doing sold out shows all around the world with multiple artists, it becomes something pretty phenomenal. I still see Justin, I don't see Justin Bieber. I don't see Ariana Grande. I see Ariana. I see them as humans and because I've been there from the start and I've seen them at their worst, I've seen them at their best ... "You become family with these people and you are naive. You know that at one point things might not work out like everything else. We have no intention of going separate ways. It's wild when I see people reacting in a certain way because I don't see them in that light. I get protective like family sometimes because in today's world, we're all allowed to say whatever we want. There's no accountability anymore, you can literally make up a story and say whatever facts you want." Meanwhile, Scooter asks his clients to operate on a 50/50 split, and do half "privately for your soul" and the other publicly to help inspire others. Speaking on the *Pretty Big Deal* with Ashley Graham, he said: "The things that I'm proud of in my life, the things I want to be known for are the philanthropy ... "Her [his wife], the kids and giving; those are things I'm proudest. Those are the things I think of. The shows I was a part of like Ariana in Manchester, helping with the Children's March or the hurricane relief ... When you get to certain place, that's actually what matters. I have a rule with all my clients, as you know, and that's 50 / 50. 50 per cent you should do privately for your soul, 50 per cent you need to do publicly despite any criticism because someone might be watching and you'll inspire them."



Witherspoon says daughter's college plans felt like arrow to the heart

Reece Witherspoon says her daughter's college applications felt like "an arrow to the heart". The 44-year-old actress has opened up on her new show 'Little Fires Everywhere' - based on Celeste Ng's book - and she revealed how the source material struck a chord as Ava, 20, was preparing for the next stage of her life. She told *Emmy* magazine: "My daughter was applying for college back then, so it hit me like an arrow in the heart. "It's so difficult to articulate what motherhood means, and there are so many passages in the novel that did." Reese - who has Ava with ex-husband Ryan Phillippe and also has kids Deacon, 16, and Tennessee, seven, with current husband Jim Toth - revealed her favourite passage from the book, which compared parenthood to an apple. The quote reads: "It was like training yourself to live on the smell of an apple alone, when what you really wanted was to devour it, to sink your teeth into it and consume it, seeds, core, and all."



For the star, it resonated as her own children are getting older. She added: "It's such a vivid way to describe the loss of your children as they grow up." Reese previously admitted becoming a mother at such a young age - she was 23 when she welcomed Ava into the world - completely changed her life. She explained: "I had to grow up really fast, and figure out what woman I wanted to be for my daughter." However, she has also insisted having a baby is a lot easier in your

twenties than thirties. She said: "I find that having little kids is more physical and it's just really hard on your body, so I am glad that I had kids kind of young. "I had one at 23, one at 27 and then again at 37. And oh my god, having a baby at 37 was so much harder. This is just me being real."

Eva Amurri's life feels like 'a blur' after giving birth

Eva Amurri's life feels like "a blur" following the birth of her baby son 10 days ago. The 35-year-old actress - who is the daughter of Susan Sarandon - welcomed her third child Mateo into the world last week with her ex-husband Kyle Martino and has admitted she's struggling to keep her emotions in check while people around world are isolating themselves to avoid the deadly COVID-19 pandemic. Taking to her Instagram account, Eva - who also has son Major James, three, and daughter Marlowe Mae, five, with Kyle - wrote: "IT'S A BLUR "Desperate times call for desperate measures. My kids have watched a lot of screens this week/end and have eaten way less vegetables. Processed foods and "shortcuts" abound. My house is a mess. Laundry is piling up. Trying to bless and release the feelings of inadequacy that all this gives me. Feeling grateful to have @kylemartino here helping out and for my friends who keep checking in on me. It's a weird time to be Postpartum for sure. "Yesterday I "overdid" it and got really faint and started bleeding again pretty badly. It was a reminder to slow down and take it easy- that many things can wait and that I have to be tending to myself right now. "If there are any other postpartum mamas following me and reading this, consider this YOUR reminder. (sic) A little over a month before Mateo was born, Eva and Kyle's divorce was finalised. The former lovers' eight-year marriage was legally dissolved by the courts on February 4, 2020 - three months after they announced they had split. Prior to giving birth, Eva said she didn't

want Kyle to witness the arrival of his third child because she wanted to feel she could "let go" during labor. Writing in her blog, she said: "Our intimacy level has totally changed now that we aren't a couple, obviously, and in order to really let go and allow labor to progress (especially with a home birth) it's so important to feel completely at ease in your body and support ... I've realized that having a strong female energy present at my birth this time is going to bring that for me. "I've elected to have my female midwives, my awesome doula (also a woman), and some incredible girlfriends — who are all Mamas as well."



DJ Khaled to work out every morning in isolation

DJ Khaled is trying to work out every morning now he's in isolation. The "Wild Thoughts" hitmaker has admitted he hasn't been to the gym for a while and is determined to put exercise back into his routine now that he's spending most of his time at home eating and watching TV due to the coronavirus crisis. Taking to his Instagram account, he said: "Back at it, back at it!" I guess while we're all at our houses and cribs, we're all going to be eating a lot. It is what it is, we're all going to be eating a lot. We need to be honest with ourselves, watching a lot of TV. "We're going to have to put a workout into our routine as well so every morning I'm going to get it in. Let's go. "Also you'll notice, no hair cut alert. It is what it is. At least look at the bright side, when we do get haircuts, it's going to be legendary. Let's go." The 44-year-old singer became a Weight Watchers ambassador in 2018 and, as a result, lost 26 pounds due to the manageable points system. He said at the time: "Man, Weight Watchers is going good. The freestyle pro-



gram is doing real big. It's a real lifestyle because all you have to do is not go over your point [total]. And there are so many zero points [foods] in case you get hungry. I got the freestyle dance. Right now, the last weigh in as like 26 pounds. I got rid of - I don't lose. All I do is win - you know what I mean." At the time, the 'Do You Mind' hitmaker said he wanted to lose weight for his son Asahd, now three years old, because he loves him so much.

— Bang Showbiz

Lifestyle | Features



In this file photo taken on April 19, 2007 in Paris Albert Uderzo, French author and illustrator who launched the Asterix comics strip character in 1959 with author René Goscinny, poses with the statues of his characters Asterix and Obelix (right).



In this file photo taken on November 16, 1967 French comic book artists Albert Uderzo (left) and René Goscinny present models of the characters of Asterix during a reception at the Maxim's restaurant in Paris before the release of the cartoon.



In this file photo taken in the 1970's, French comic book artists Albert Uderzo (right) and René Goscinny (left) pose with a drawing of their characters Asterix.—AFP photos

Asterix' co-creator **Albert Uderzo** dies at 92

Albert Uderzo, the playful French illustrator behind the magic potion-swigging comic book hero Asterix the Gaul whose adventures fighting the Roman legions have enthralled readers of all ages around the world, died overnight aged 92, his family said Tuesday. "Albert Uderzo died in his sleep at his home in Neuilly, after a heart attack that was not linked to the coronavirus. He had been extremely tired for the past several weeks," his son-in-law Bernard de Choisy told AFP. News of his death prompted an emotional outpouring from the generations of fans who have followed the adventures of Asterix and his robust sidekick Obelix in books translated into over 100 languages as well as films, toys and even a theme park.

"A true legend, the little Gaul is now part of the world's literary and artistic heritage, and will long continue to embody the values of tolerance and resistance in his adventures," said Arnaud Nourry, head of Uderzo's publishing house Hachette Livre. Uderzo created Asterix in 1959 with fellow Frenchman and writer René Goscinny, bringing them to life in the French-Belgian comics magazine Pilote. With his winged helmet and formidable blond moustache, Asterix and Obelix — who famously fell into the druid's strength-giving potion as a baby — became an irresistible symbol of a France defying outside forces to forge its own path.

The series has extended into 38 books, most recently "Asterix and the Chieftain's Daughter" from last year, that have sold 380 million copies worldwide and been translated into some 110 languages and dialects, including Latin and Ancient Greek. Nearly 1.6 million copies of "The Chieftain's Daughter" were sold last year in France alone, putting it at the top of best-seller lists. Uderzo stopped illustrating the series in 2011, having carried on alone after Goscinny's death in 1977. But their style and dialogue are faithfully imitated by the new writing team. Both Goscinny and Uderzo had a monumental impact on comics, elevating them from three-panel strips in newspapers to a witty and insightful art form able to sustain stories that could fill a book.

The pun-filled series is brimming with fist-fights, drunken arguments, heroic rescues and romantic interludes, and the stories often include not-so-subtle references to politicians or popular figures of the day. Several of the Asterix volumes have been turned into animated cartoons and live-action feature films — the latest, "Asterix and Obelix: The Silk Road," is currently in production, with industry bible Variety reporting that it has a budget of over \$70 million, huge for a French production.

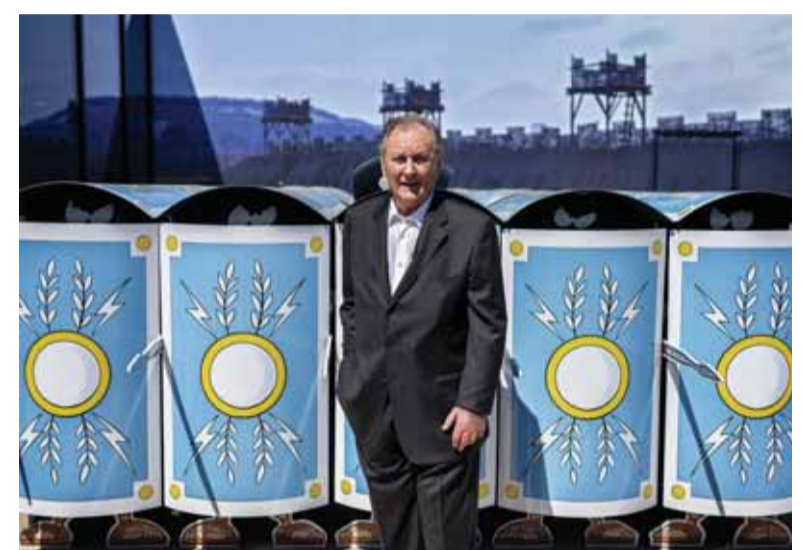
'Nobody recognises me'

Uderzo was born April 25, 1927, in Fismes, a village in northeast France near Reims, to

Italian immigrants — his father was a luthier. At birth he had six fingers on each hand, an anomaly corrected by surgery, and was color blind. Yet he was able to develop his love of drawing by joining a Parisian publishing house after World War II, while also providing comic strips for newspapers. "Making a living through comics was extremely hard in those days. I drew an astronomical amount of pages just to get through the month," he recalled.

He met Goscinny in 1951, beginning a friendship that would lead to their dreaming up Asterix and his village in American Brittany, fuelled by cigarettes and pastis liquor, in a social housing apartment outside Paris eight years later. Uderzo claimed he was inspired by tales from his older brother Bruno, who made frequent trips to western France to escape labour conscription by the Nazi occupiers. The first Asterix book, "Asterix the Gaul," appeared in 1961 and became an overnight sensation.

Marketing rights that extended to toys and even a popular French amusement park would make Uderzo a wealthy man, with a mansion in the posh Neuilly suburb of Paris and a collection of Ferrari supercars. In 2017, an original Uderzo cover for one of the first Asterix books sold in Paris for a record 1.4 million euros. Yet the easygoing Uderzo regarded his success with amused detachment, and largely avoided the media spotlight even as his reputation soared. "Nobody recognizes me when I walk



In this file photo taken on April 23, 2015 French comic book artist and scriptwriter Albert Uderzo attends an exhibition dedicated to the Asterix comic books series which he co-created at the MuseeParc d'Alesia museum in Alise-Sainte-Reine.

In this file photo taken on April 23, 2015 French comic book artist and scriptwriter Albert Uderzo attends an exhibition dedicated to the Asterix comic books series which he co-created at the MuseeParc d'Alesia museum in Alise-Sainte-Reine.



Street musician Luis Valdovinos is seen in Mexico City, where increasingly empty streets are making it harder for him to make a living.—AFP

Mexico street artists and vendors worry about virus-hit future

Before the coronavirus pandemic struck, Luis Valdovinos was earning about \$12 a day playing his barrel organ in the streets of Mexico City. Now, it's taking him a lot longer to make that much money. The streets of the Mexican capital are emptying out with each passing day, as residents become more and more aware of the need to practice social distancing to curb the virus's spread. For performers like Valdovinos, such measures are threatening his livelihood. "Some people have money (to offer), and the rest of them can go to hell," said the 46-year-old, whose instrument creates a somewhat ominous drone that fits the mood of a city in fear. "All of Mexico is afraid. Businesses are closing. Unfortunately, those of us who live off the streets every day are the ones who are hit hardest."

Valdovinos is part of the whopping 56 percent of all Mexicans who work in the informal economy. No taxes, no social security, no safety net. Many of those people live day to day, and simply cannot work from home, as tens of millions of people around the world with typical office jobs are able to do. "Those who cannot have a 'home office' run a greater risk of suffering the economic and social consequences of this public health crisis," said the advocacy group Citizen Action Against Poverty. "Their low income and list of needs make these people the most vulnerable in a virus pandemic scenario that requires quarantining and social distancing," the group said.

'No other choice'

Gabriel Gonzalez is facing many of the same problems as Valdovinos. The 42-year-old Gonzalez is a street clown — he specifically dons the make-up of the sinister Pennywise from Stephen King's "It." Before the coronavirus crisis erupted, he could count on making about \$40 a day in fees paid by tourists wanting to take pictures with him. Now, he's making 10 times less than that, as the mega-city of more

than 20 million people turns into a virtual ghost town, and tourists are scarce. "It's hard at home right now. But we have no other choice but to keep working," Gonzalez told AFP.

'What else can we do?'

Salvador Alvarado, 51, slices meat for traditional Mexican tacos. His business has slowed to a near halt. "What else can we do? Nothing. We can just keep working," he says with a mix of anger and resignation. "People don't want to go out to eat anymore. They are totally panicked. If everything shuts down, we'll see how well we can survive." So far, Mexico has more than 350 confirmed coronavirus cases, and has registered four deaths. The food and restaurant business is one of the sectors hardest hit by the health crisis. Many employees, who earn the minimum wage, say they fear greater hardships as the pandemic drags on.

On social media, Mexicans call for residents to order takeout meals from small mom-and-pop restaurants and shops, to help save those businesses from going under. But Asea, a Mexican company that operates major US chains such as Burger King and Starbucks, came under sweeping criticism for granting employees 30 days of unpaid leave — some even called for the chains to be boycotted.

The Mexican economy, the second-largest in Latin America after Brazil, is bracing to take a major hit from the coronavirus crisis. Several analysts have predicted that the economic slowdown in 2020 could reach four percent. President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador admitted last week that a crisis was on the horizon and, in a video message broadcast on social media, asked Mexicans to keep going to restaurants to shore up the industry. "Don't stop going out!" he urged. "I'll tell you when it's time not to go outside anymore."—AFP

Afro-jazz star **Manu Dibango** dies after contracting coronavirus

Veteran Afro-jazz legend Manu Dibango died Tuesday after contracting the new coronavirus, one of the first worldwide stars to succumb to the disease. The 86-year-old Cameroonian, best known for the 1972 hit "Soul Makossa", "died early this morning in a hospital in the Paris region," his music publisher Thierry Durepaire said. A message on his official Facebook page confirmed that his death had come after he contracted COVID-19. "His funeral service will be held in strict privacy, and a tribute to his memory will be organized when possible," the message said. "OH NO NOT YOU MANU DIBANGO," Senegalese singer Youssou N'dour wrote on Twitter. "I don't have the words to express all my sadness."

French Culture Minister Franck Riester also paid tribute to him on Twitter. "The world of music has lost one of its legends," he wrote. "The generosity and talent of Manu Dibango knew no frontiers." The saxophonist was one of the pioneers of Afro jazz and also fused funk with traditional Cameroonian music. His biggest hit was "Soul Makossa", the B-side of a song to support the Cameroon football team in the African Cup of Nations but was picked up and popularized by New York DJs. In 2009, he accused Michael Jackson of borrowing one of his hooks for two songs on the legendary "Thriller" album. Jackson settled out of court. "I have the harmonies of Bach and Handel in my ear with Cameroonian lyrics," he told AFP.



In this file photo taken on March 31, 2006 African jazz saxophonist Manu Dibango performs during the 7th Annual Cape Town International Jazz Festival.



In this file photo taken on June 30, 2018 Cameroonian jazz saxophonist Manu Dibango performs during a concert at the Ivory Hotel in Abidjan.—AFP photos

in an August 2019 interview with AFP.

'Raised in the Hallelujah'

"It is a luxury to be able to have at least two possibilities. In life, I prefer to be stereo than mono." The eclectic tastes that Dibango brought to his music can be traced back to his upbringing. Emmanuel N'Djoko Dibango was born on December 12, 1933, growing up in a strictly observant Protestant family. "My paternal uncle played the harmonium, my mother ran the choir. I'm a child raised in the 'Hallelujah'," he told AFP. "But that doesn't stop me from

being African, Cameroonian, and all that." When was 15 years old, his father sent him to France in the hope of him becoming an engineer or a doctor.

He did his studies in the northern cathedral city of Chartres, where he made his first steps in music, learning the mandolin and the piano. By his own admission ignorant of African culture, he was drawn to the jazz giants of the day: big band leaders Count Basie and Duke Ellington and the saxophonist Charlie Parker became his heroes, he said.—AFP

Glastonbury cancels 50th anniversary festival over virus

The organizers of the annual Glastonbury music festival said yesterday they had cancelled this year's 50th anniversary event due to the coronavirus pandemic. "We are so sorry to announce this, but we are going to have to cancel Glastonbury 2020," organizers said in a statement on Twitter, adding tickets for the 2020 event will roll over to 2021. Pop superstar Taylor Swift had been set to headline for the first time at Britain's best known music festival, held at a rural farm site in southwest England since 1970. Beatles icon Paul McCartney and US rapper Kendrick Lamar were also set to perform on the main stage. British artist Dua Lipa, the Manic Street Preachers band and Primal Scream were among the other confirmed performers. All 135,000 tickets for the 50th anniversary festival went on sale in October and sold out in 34 minutes.

Organizers Emily Eavis and her father Michael Eavis said they made the decision after the British government this week recommended a raft of social distancing measures. Britain has recorded 1,950 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 71 deaths. "This is now our only viable option," the Glastonbury organizers said in a statement, adding they hoped the situation will have improved by the late June date of the festival. —AFP



Kevin Hart to become a father again

The 'Ride Along' star and his wife Eniko are expecting their second child together and they "couldn't be more grateful" to be adding another little one to their brood. Taking to her Instagram account on Tuesday, Eniko uploaded a photograph of her baby bump draped in a sheer black figure-hugging dress and wrote: "baby #2 in the midst of all of this we're counting our blessings and couldn't be more grateful! soon to be a family of 6! #glowingandgrowing (sic)"

The new addition will bring their family to a total of six as they already have two-year-old son Kenzo together, while the 40-year-old comedian also has daughter Heaven, 15, and son Hendrix, 12, with his ex-wife Torrei Hart. Their

exciting baby news comes just six months after Kevin ended up in surgery with a fractured spine after he was involved in a near-fatal car accident — and since then he's realized that he can't take life for "granted."

He said recently: "Basically, what you realize is you're not in control. At the end of the day, it can all be over, man. So don't take today for granted. "I basically was put in a situation where I was like, 'Oh, my God. Am I going to be able to walk, am I going to recover, am I going to be able to get back to myself?' And through hard work, determination, and pure will, I got to a place where I can be physically active again.—BangShowbiz



A picture shows Dubai's Burj Khalifa lit up with a message "Stay Home" on Tuesday, reminding people to stay home amid the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic. — AFP

Loss of smell could reveal hidden coronavirus cases

PARIS: From a mother unable to smell her baby's nappy to a lawmaker who suddenly could not taste food, some coronavirus patients have described a loss of olfactory senses - and experts say this might be a new way to detect the virus. Ear, nose and throat (ENT) specialists in

Britain, the United States and France have noted a growing number of patients in recent weeks with anosmia - the abrupt loss of smell - and have said this could be a sign of COVID-19 in people who otherwise appear well. Official figures suggest the coronavirus has infected

some 380,000 people as the pandemic proliferates around the world, but with many cases going undetected experts have become concerned about the potential for people without symptoms to spread the virus. The World Health Organization lists the most common signs of COVID-19 as fever, tiredness and dry cough.

In Britain, ENT doctors have urged health authorities to advise people with a sudden loss of smell or taste to self-isolate even if they have no other symptoms. "Anything we can do to delay transmission is absolutely vital," Claire Hopkins, the president of the British Rhinological Society, told AFP. Hopkins, who published an open letter on the issue on Friday with ENT UK chief Nirmal Kumar, said she was not surprised when she heard initial reports from Iran and France of COVID-19 patients reporting a loss of smell.

Around 40 percent of cases of sudden loss of smell in adults are caused by post-viral anosmia, she said, and previously known coronaviruses are thought to account for up to 15 percent. But she said the turning point came when an Italian colleague working in a hospital in the worst-hit north of the country mentioned he had observed a high incidence of loss of smell among frontline health workers. This led to a flurry of posts on professional message boards.

"We all started to note an increase in patients who were young and otherwise completely asymptomatic presenting with new onset sense of smell loss," said Hopkins. Nine out of the 20 patients she saw last week had recently lost their ability to smell. "That's extremely unusual," she said, adding that several of these patients had called Britain's health authorities concerned about COVID-19 but were told there was no need to self-isolate because it was not a recognized symptom.

Experts in several countries have flagged anosmia as a potential sign of COVID-19. In France the head of the health service, Jerome Salomon, on Friday said ENT specialists had observed a "surge" in anosmia cases and said while it was still relatively rare, it had been seen in younger patients with "mild" symptoms. The American Academy of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery on Sunday noted growing anecdotal evidence that anosmia and dysgeusia - taste disorder - were "significant symptoms" of the virus.

In Germany, virologist Hendrik Streeck from the University of Bonn, went house to house in Heinsberg, where around 1000 people were put under a two-week quarantine in February because of a local outbreak. He said some two thirds of infected people reported losing their sense of smell and taste for a few days. "It went so far that one mother could no longer smell her child's full nappy. Others couldn't smell their shampoo anymore and their food started to taste bland," he told the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung newspaper.

A lack of testing in many countries means that often only those with the most severe symptoms are confirmed to have the virus. But several high-profile patients with milder cases have reported a loss of olfactory senses. Nadine Dorries, the first British politician to test positive, said she lost both her sense of smell and taste. "Eating and drinking warm or cold that's all I can tell," she posted on Twitter last week. French basketball player Rudy Gobert, 27, whose positive coronavirus test prompted the NBA to shut down its season, tweeted he had not "been able to smell anything for the last 4 days" on Sunday. — AFP

One-third of humanity under...

Continued from Page 1

They will be discharged from hospital within two days, the minister added.

Financial markets soared as the Senate and the White House thrashed out a stimulus package worth roughly 10 percent of the entire US economy, an injection Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said represented a "wartime level of investment into our nation". US President Donald Trump has voiced hope that the United States would be "raring to go" by mid-April, but his optimism appeared to stand almost alone among world leaders, who were ratcheting up the movement restrictions in a bid to stifle the spread of the disease. India ordered its 1.3 billion people - the world's second-biggest population - to stay at home for three weeks.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "total lockdown" call doubled the number of people around the globe under some form of movement restriction to more than 2.6 billion people. "To save India, to save its every citizen, you, your family... every street, every neighborhood is being put under lockdown," Modi said in a televised address.

Mumbai vegetable trader Rafiq Ansari said his customers were getting angry over shortages and price hikes. "I don't understand what's going on," the 35-year-old told AFP. "It's getting increasingly difficult to source produce. We are going to face major shortages in the days ahead." However China, where the new virus emerged last year, loosened tough rules on the 50 million people in Hubei province yesterday after a months-long lockdown as the country reported no new domestic cases. The provincial capital Wuhan - the ground zero of the outbreak after it was initially detected at a market that sold wild animals for human consumption - will allow residents to leave from April 8.

The pandemic has cut a swathe through the world's sporting and cultural events, and on Tuesday claimed the biggest of them all: the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe tried to sound an optimistic note, vowing that the rescheduled Games in 2021 would be "a testament to mankind's defeat of the new virus". The postponement marks the first time that the world's biggest sporting event, set to open on July 24, has been delayed in peacetime.

Across the planet, the grim COVID-19 toll mounted further, with more than 18,200 deaths and 405,000 declared infections, half of them in Europe according to an AFP tally. The medical situation is still critical in Europe, where hardest-hit Italy had mixed news. The Mediterranean country's death toll shot back up to 743 after two days of slight decline from a world-record peak of 793 on Saturday. But officially registered new infections rose just eight percent for the second straight day.

Elsewhere Ireland ordered non-essential businesses shut, Britain planned a 4,000-bed emergency hospital in London and Spain called for practical support from the NATO military alliance. Countries in Africa, where health systems are often fragile, are also ramping up their response to the

virus as cases and deaths rise. And nearly 130 million Americans, or 40 percent of the population, are under or will soon come under some lockdown order, including in the largest state of California.

Many governments are listening to health experts who warn the only way to slow the epidemic - and save the lives of the elderly and vulnerable - is by imposing "social isolation" measures on a population. But Trump is not convinced the move is worth the enormous economic cost. "A lot of people agree with me. Our country - it's not built to shut down," he told Fox News. "You can destroy a country this way by closing it down."

Global markets finally started to recoup some of the losses they have logged over a tumultuous few weeks. The Dow Jones Industrial Average on Tuesday surged 11.3 percent, its biggest rally since 1933 during the Great Depression. The massive rise - which was followed by huge jumps on Asian markets, including an 8.0 percent bump in Tokyo - came as traders took heart from agreements on Capitol Hill for the largest ever emergency spending effort. "At last, we have a deal," McConnell said, after negotiating into the small hours.

The Senate and House of Representatives still need to pass the legislation before sending it to Trump for his signature. The US Federal Reserve earlier unveiled an unprecedented bond-buying program, in a move not seen since the global financial crisis more than a decade ago. And finance ministers and central bank chiefs of the Group of Seven major industrial democracies have vowed to "do whatever is necessary to restore confidence and economic growth and to protect jobs, businesses, and the resilience of the financial system".

Saudi Arabia on Tuesday reported its first death from the new coronavirus as the total number of infections spiked to 767, according to the health ministry. An Afghan resident in the western city of Madinah died from the virus, the ministry said, while reporting 205 new infections - the biggest jump in the kingdom in a single day. Saudi Arabia, which has reported the highest number of infections in the Gulf, began implementing a nationwide dusk-to-dawn curfew on Monday to limit the spread of the deadly COVID-19 illness.

The Arab world's biggest economy has also closed down cinemas, malls and restaurants, halted flights and suspended the year-round umrah pilgrimage as it steps up efforts to contain the virus. Similar restrictions and stimulus measures have been reported by other countries in the Gulf, where more than 2,100 coronavirus infections have been reported so far.

In the neighboring United Arab Emirates, a two-week suspension of all passenger flights and transits announced a day earlier began at 11:59 pm (1959 GMT) on Tuesday. Dubai's international airport is the busiest in the world for international passengers, with 86.4 million travellers passing through last year. Oman also said it would suspend all passenger flights from March 29 except to and from Musandam, bordering the UAE.

The UAE said Tuesday it had arrested a woman for posting a video allegedly "encouraging people to defy authorities on social distancing instructions". Nearby Bahrain recorded its third death from the virus on Tuesday. Kuwait's Cabinet has said anyone caught intentionally spreading the virus could face up to 10 years in jail, according to state media. — Agencies

Tokyo begins Olympic task of...

Continued from Page 1

Olympic Committee saying the new date would be "beyond 2020 but not later than summer 2021". Japan has framed Tokyo 2020 as the "Recovery Games" - a chance to show the world it has bounced back from the "triple disaster" in 2011 when a massive earthquake sparked a tsunami and the Fukushima nuclear meltdown.

The delayed event - still to be called Tokyo 2020 - will now be a "testament to mankind's defeat of the new virus", said Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. He repeated that message in a call yesterday with US President Donald Trump, in which the leaders agreed the Games would be "proof that humans have beaten the new coronavirus", a Japanese government spokesman said. The Olympic flame "could become the light at the end of the tunnel in which the world finds itself at present", Japan and the IOC said in a joint statement.

The quadrennial Olympics, which has weathered boycotts, terrorist attacks and protests, is the highest-profile event affected by the virus that has killed thousands and postponed or cancelled sports competitions worldwide. The IOC had come under fire for appearing out of touch by sticking to its schedule, but it eventually bowed to the inevitable, citing the need to protect the health of athletes. Bach said the postponement was "about protecting human life", with more than 11,000 athletes expected along with 90,000 volunteers, and hundreds of thousands of officials and spectators from all over the world.

US swimming star Ryan Lochte summed up the combination of disappointment and relief expressed by most athletes, after many had voiced anger at being asked to continue training during the pandemic. "I was a little pissed off because I've been training my

butt off and I've been feeling great," the 12-time Olympic medalist told the Los Angeles Times. "But this whole thing is way bigger than me," Lochte added. "It's way bigger than the Olympians, it's affecting the entire world right now."

There were similar feelings on the streets of Tokyo, which had won widespread praise for its preparations, with tickets in high demand and venues completed well ahead of schedule. "It is disappointing for sure, but when you think about the health of athletes as well as spectators, I understand," IT engineer Momoko Doku told AFP on the bustling Shibuya crossing. "The new coronavirus is spreading so fast in the world, and this is a very serious issue internationally," he said.

The Japanese media were also broadly supportive, although the Tokyo Shimbun daily screamed "surprise and embarrassment". "It is like all the efforts of the last seven years are back to square one," the Nikkei business daily said. The Olympic torch relay, due to begin from Fukushima today, has also been postponed but the flame will stay in the area until it is safe to begin.

Organizers now have to wrestle with a host of unanswered questions: are the venues still available? What to do with ticket-holders and volunteers? How to fit the Games into a crowded 2021 sporting schedule? The athlete's village was due to be renovated into more than 4,000 luxury apartments, hundreds of which have already been snapped up. Tens of thousands of hotel rooms will need to be cancelled and rebooked.

Japan and the organizing committee were spending \$12.6 billion on the Games and experts say they may need to spend around half that again to rearrange the event - before hopefully recouping the losses when the Olympics are held. Tokyo 2020 president Yoshiro Mori, an 82-year former prime minister and cancer survivor, pointed to his own health battles as inspiration for the difficult times ahead. "We have no choice but to have hope. I myself suffered cancer.. But I was saved by a new drug. I am here, allowed to live. "Let us hope for these things." — AFP

Stars

Daily SuDoku

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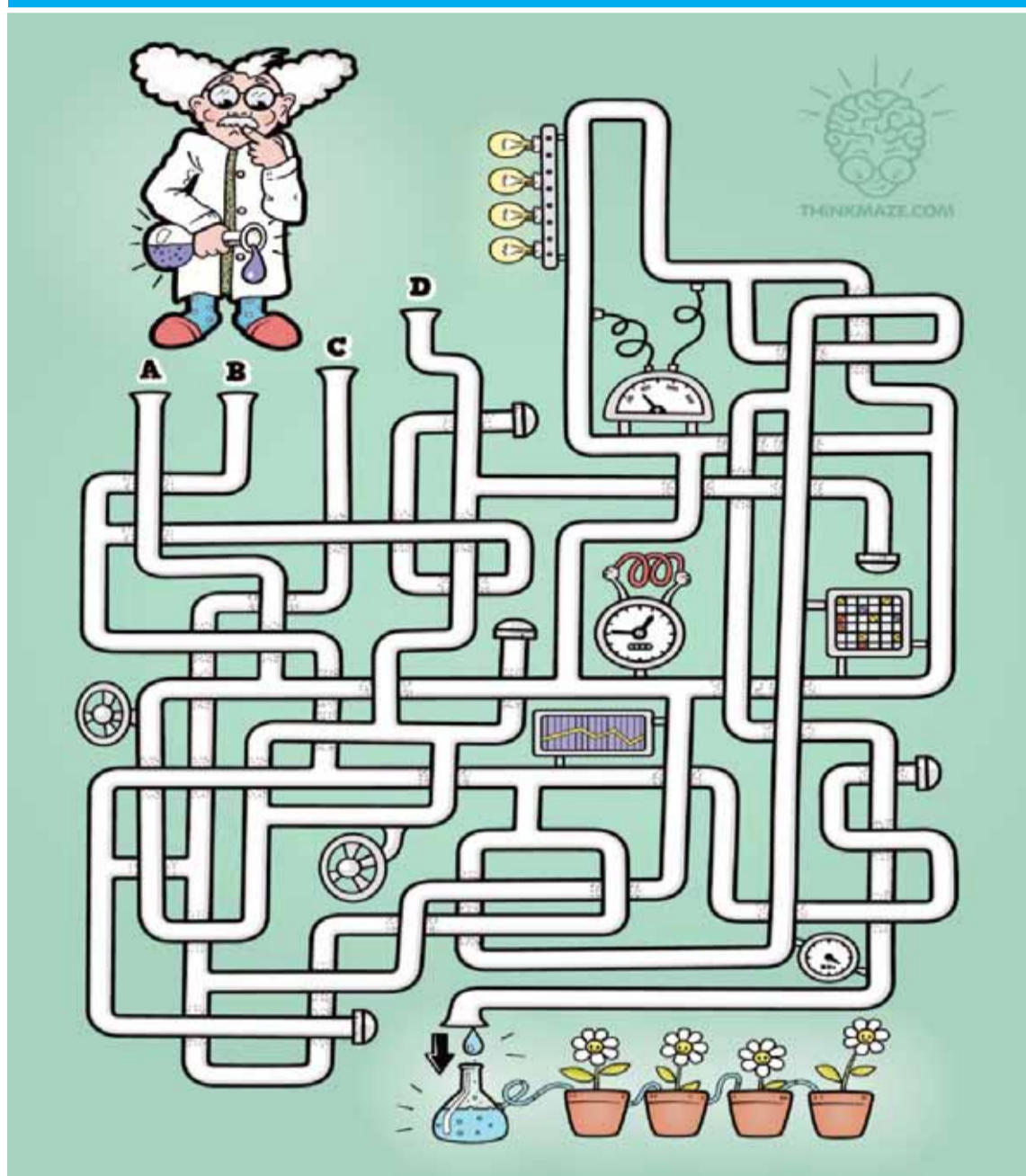
very hard

Yesterday's Solution

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

medium

Find the way



Color It



STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

You have a warm and sensitive nature, Aries, and today you could be feeling especially tuned in to the feelings of others. Romance is very much on your mind, as are all things sensual. If you're shopping for clothes, you'll likely be drawn to rich and luxurious fabrics. Don't hesitate to indulge this passionate side of yourself. Your mate will likely be quite appreciative!



Libra (September 23-October 22)

You may feel at odds with the rest of the world now, Libra, as you yearn for some quiet time alone. See if you can find a balance between spending time with your family and time alone. If you set the alarm to wake you early, you can enjoy the peace and quiet of dawn. If you aren't an early riser, you can always sequester yourself in the library for a few hours of solitude.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

The planetary energy makes this a good day for contemplation rather than action, Taurus. If you feel the urge to buy, don't. Sleep on decisions. If you feel the same tomorrow, go for it. If you're in the middle of a conflict at work, try not to take sides. Tell anyone who asks your opinion that you need time to think about it. Consider scheduling an hour of meditation.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

You have a warm and sensitive nature, Scorpio, and today you could be feeling especially tuned in to the feelings of others. Romance is very much on your mind, as are all things sensual. If you're shopping for clothes, you'll likely be drawn to rich and luxurious fabrics. Don't hesitate to indulge this passionate side of yourself. Your mate will likely be quite appreciative!



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Passion and romance are in the air, Gemini, so make the most of the great atmosphere! Everyone seems to be in a festive mood. You feel close to others and feel profound gratitude for the loved ones in your life. Consider leaving work early to go home to snuggle up close with your special someone. Be sure to be extra open about sharing your feelings today.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

This may be a tricky day, Sagittarius, as you feel the pull of conflicting demands and desires. On the one hand, you feel obligated to your career and fulfilling the demands of your employer. On the other, your loved ones miss you and would like to have you around more. There's no easy answer, although you might want to consider ways to delegate more work so you can spend more time with your loved ones.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Passion and romance are in the air, Gemini, so make the most of the great atmosphere! Everyone seems to be in a festive mood. You feel close to others and feel profound gratitude for the loved ones in your life. Consider leaving work early to go home to snuggle up close with your special someone. Be sure to be extra open about sharing your feelings today.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

It doesn't seem fair that your workload has increased these last few days. Never mind that you still have all of your normal tasks to do, your boss expects you to finalize a new budget and write a proposal as well? Enlist the help of others if you can. If you can't, simply do the best you can without sacrificing time with your family and loved ones. Ultimately, Capricorn, the latter is more important.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

You must weigh your physical limitations with your desire to get everything done, Leo. You run the risk of wearing yourself out and getting sick just as you finish your tasks. Enlist the help of others, if you can, for all those chores and errands that absolutely need to be done. You should definitely leave anything that can wait. Your health needs to come first!



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

You've been extremely busy these past few months, working extra hours at the office, then going out with friends late at night. This sort of behavior is known as "burning the candle at both ends," and it rarely has a happy ending, Aquarius. You need to take some quiet time, ideally with someone special. It's likely that your romantic partner misses you and would jump at the opportunity to spend an intimate evening with you.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Today you could realize that a friend is actually your soul mate, Virgo. You've been spending a lot of time together attending social events, and you've come to realize how much you look forward to each other's company. Your new level of affection seems obvious, but it would be a good idea to put it into words. If you can't screw up the courage to do so, express your thoughts with a gift.



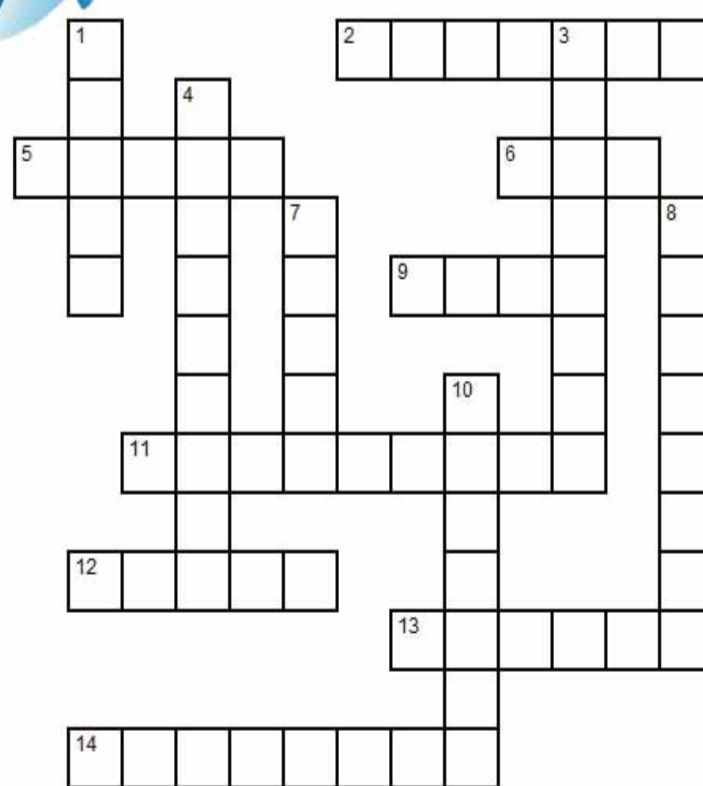
Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Expect today's planetary energies to raise your social consciousness, Pisces. You may be distracted with thoughts of the homeless person you saw today, or the television special you saw on babies with AIDS. You may be reflecting on your connection to and responsibilities toward humanity. Why don't you put aside a little time or money for the charity of your choice? If you're feeling these urges, don't hesitate to act on them!

Crossword



Ocean Animals



ACROSS

- fat layer that keeps some marine mammals warm
- fish use these to breathe oxygen from the water
- name for a group of whales
- ocean dwellers that lay eggs and have bones
- what a shark has instead of bones
- a shark has several rows of these
- what younger whales are called
- marine animals with soft bodies and no backbone

DOWN

- small creatures that look like shrimp
- how a whale or dolphin breathes
- largest animal in the world
- bioluminescent animals make their own
- clams, oysters and scallops are all ...
- ocean dwellers that birth live babies and nurse their young

Sports

Prospective Olympians give postponement plenty of likes

'Postponing Olympics to 2021 is the best decision for me'

PARIS: Prospective Olympic competitors were quick out of the blocks after the Tokyo Games were postponed until 2021 and most gave the decision the thumbs up on social media. The consensus was the International Olympic Committee had made the right decision in the face of the uncertainty caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

"All in all a very wise decision," tweeted Eliud Kipchoge, the Olympic marathon champion and the only man to run the distance in less than two hours. "I look forward to come back to Japan to defend my Olympic title next year and look forward to witness a wonderful event."

Italian cyclist Elia Viviani, a track gold medalist in Rio in 2016, whose country has recorded most deaths from COVID-19, summed up much of the reaction when he tweeted:

"Postponing the Olympics to 2021 is the best decision for me. Today we are all struggling with a much bigger problem....So Olympics see you in 2021!"

One of his sprint rivals, Britain's Mark Cavendish said: "BIG news and it's the right call," before adding: "On a sporting side, there's going to be a few nations thankful for 12 months more preparation!"

Belgian cyclist Victor Campenaerts was worried about his girlfriend, swimmer Fanny Lecluyse: "She has already been selected, will she be selected for next year's Olympics? Does she have to qualify again? She was planning to retire after these Games."

For some athletes, like Simone Biles who had said she planned to retire after Tokyo, it means another year of hard work. Her coach said the US gymnasts were ready. "As needed as it is, for every athlete especially gymnasts who've started this journey so young, worked as hard of even harder for this," tweeted Cecile Landi, who competed for France but coaches in Texas.

"BUT We will regroup and 'replan' to get back strong for 2021!" Russian gymnast Angelina Melnikova, was less happy with the decision. "I'm very excited and now I'm very upset, we are all very upset. But now we have time," she posted on Instagram. "I'll do my best gymnastics ever. Let's go with me."

At 25, British diver Tom Daley, who has won medals at the last two Olympics, said the extra year would take a toll. "Yes, I'll be another year older, and my body will feel that, but I promise to work my tail off."

Among athletes who might feel the stopwatch is against them, there was support. Mary Kom, a 38-year-old Indian boxer and a member of parliament, who made news at the weekend by breaking quarantine after returning from abroad, to attend a breakfast hosted by President Ram Nath Kovind, tweeted: "Excellent and right decision."

'SAME FLAME, NEW DATES'

Carli Lloyd, a 37-year-old US footballer who has two gold medals told local television: "It's bigger than an Olympics. I definitely think it's the

Same flame, new dates

right call. Disappointed... but I think for the safety of everybody, it's definitely the best thing."

The 2012 women's triathlon champion, Nicola Spirig, applauded the decision but hinted it could mark the end of her career. "For the past months, I have been working daily towards my goal of competing at my fifth Olympic Summer Games...I am therefore glad to have clarity now and fully support the IOC's decision," the 38-year-old Swiss posted on Instagram.

"As far as my sporting future is concerned...I will take my time and discuss my options together with my family and team before coming to a decision in the weeks to come."

Others did not try to hide their disappointment.



TOKYO: The Olympic rings are seen through the branches of a tree in Tokyo's Odaiba district yesterday, the day after the historic decision to postpone the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games. Japan yesterday started the unprecedented task of reorganising the Tokyo Olympics after the historic decision to postpone the world's biggest sporting event due to the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic that has locked down one third of the planet. —AFP

"I'm devastated. That's not to say I disagree with the decision, 100% understand and respect the reasons," track cyclist Elinor Barker, who won gold with the British pursuit team in Rio posted on Instagram.

"This pales in comparison to the loss a lot of people around the world are experiencing, but I can't pretend it doesn't hurt a little." But most expressed relief and optimism.

Dutch runner Dafne Schippers, who won silver in the 200 metres in Rio posted: "I was really looking forward...but for now we have to look at the bigger picture and do whatever it takes to beat the corona virus...let's make sure we'll celebrate even harder in 2021!"

US swimmer Lilly King, a double gold medalist in Rio, posted: "Just one more year to get better." "Not denied. Just delayed," tweeted American triple Olympic champion Tianna Bartoletta, a sprinter and long jumper.

"You gonna cry about it or boss up?" asked American wrestler Jordan Burroughs, a gold medalist in 2012, in a slangy tweet. "First of all imma do both." French double-Olympic judo champion Teddy Riner tweeted: "See you in 2021, Tokyo. First, we have a more important fight to win." British sprinter Dina Asher-Smith tweeted: "Tokyo2021. Same flame, new dates." —AFP

Sponsors to stand by delayed Olympics

TOKYO: Major corporate sponsors of the Tokyo 2020 Olympics are standing by the International Olympic Committee after the Games were postponed and experts familiar with the deals said the companies would not likely seek the return of billions of dollars committed to the agreements.

Fourteen global companies including Coca-Cola Co, Procter & Gamble Co and Intel Corp spent \$500 million this year and have committed close to \$4 billion on multi-year contracts that designate them as top-tier sponsors, according to research firm Global Data.

On Tuesday, the Tokyo Games were postponed to 2021, a first in the 124-year modern history of the event, due to the coronavirus pandemic which has prompted governments to shut businesses globally.

After the announcement, five major sponsors, Procter & Gamble, Intel, Airbnb, Coca-Cola and Samsung Electronics reaffirmed their commitment to the games. Bridgestone Corp will seek "creative solutions" in a delay, it told Reuters ahead of the announcement.

"As the longest standing sponsor of the Olympic Games, we remain committed to working together with the IOC and TOCOG (Tokyo Organising Committee) to create a successful and safe event," said a Coca-Cola spokesman.

Samsung in a statement to Reuters said, "We will continue to work closely with the IOC and Games organizers to ensure a safe and memorable Olympic Games." Despite the severe financial toll on the sponsors, the companies generally consider themselves long-term partners of the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

"No doubt, the IOC and Japan are working hand-in-hand with those 14 sponsors," said Jason Karlov, a partner at law firm Barnes & Thornburg, who has worked on previous IOC sponsor deals. "They keep the Olympic movement functioning and thriving."

Beyond the Olympics, the pandemic has forced the cancellation of nearly every national and regional sporting event in the coming months. Lawyers involved in those deals said many corporate sponsors, often smaller companies hard hit by the outbreak, are trying to back out and get their money back.

However, even if a company wanted its Olympic sponsorship money returned, it is unlikely the deal with the IOC allows it, according to those lawyers familiar with the deals. The sponsorship dollars are crucial to the operations of the IOC, which is a non-profit funded primarily by broadcast rights and revenue from top sponsors. The companies generally pay a portion of the total contract upfront when they sign and the remainder is paid in installments over the length of the agreement.

Reuters did not view the sponsorship contracts, but those familiar with the deals said every contract differs and the delay of the Tokyo games may not necessarily trigger any obligation for the IOC. —Reuters

Only war has cancelled Olympics

TOKYO: The Olympic Games has suffered political boycotts (Moscow 1980) and terrorism (Munich 1972), but has only ever been cancelled due to outbreaks of war.

With the announcement that the 2020 Games will be postponed over the coronavirus pandemic, here is a look back at Berlin 1916, Tokyo 1940 and London 1944 — when global conflicts forced the Games to be scrapped.

BERLIN 1916

At the IOC meeting in Stockholm in July 4, 1912, the sixth Olympic Games were awarded to Berlin, with the German capital beating out competition from Alexandria, Amsterdam, Brussels, Budapest and the US city of Cleveland.

Germany pulled out all the stops, opening a stadium with a capacity of around 33,000 in western Berlin's leafy Grunewald district in 1913 to celebrate 25 years of Kaiser Wilhelm II's reign as head of the German Reich.

British stars relieved at Olympic delay

LONDON: British Olympic gold medal hopefuls Katerina Johnson-Thompson, Adam Peaty and Dina Asher-Smith expressed their relief after Tokyo 2020 was delayed until next year on Tuesday due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

All three world champions had expressed their frustration at the delay of a decision on the Games, while countries across the globe imposed stringent restrictions on movement and travel to control the spread of the virus.

"A lot of athletes can breathe," Olympic 100m breast stroke champion Peaty told BBC Sport. "We felt under pressure to train and compete. "The decision from the IOC (International Olympic Committee) lifts that release that we don't have to be in shape over summer and we don't have to put unnecessary risk on others."

Johnson-Thompson is hoping to add to her world championship gold in the heptathlon last year with Olympic gold after missing out on the podium at Rio 2016.

The stadium took only 200 days to build, according to the German Olympic Committee (DOSB) and featured a 100-metre-long swimming pool on its northern side.

The sporting programme was to feature athletics, wrestling, fencing, shooting, modern pentathlon, cycling, gymnastics, swimming, rowing, hockey and golf. For the first time, women were invited to participate in swimming, diving, tennis and netball, the DOSB said in its history of the 1916 Games.

A two-day test event was held on June 27 and 28, 1914 in the Berlin stadium. On the second day, Archduke Frank Ferdinand of Austria and his wife were assassinated in Sarajevo, starting a chain of events that would lead to the outbreak of World War I.

It is not clear when the Games fell victim to the war but the founder of the modern Olympics, Pierre de Coubertin, decreed that the Berlin 1916 Games still be counted as the sixth Olympiad, even though they never took place.

The next Games — the seventh Olympiad — were awarded to Antwerp in recognition of the horrors suffered by Belgium in World War I.

A flag with the famous Olympic rings symbol was raised for the first time and doves were released at the opening ceremony as a sign of peace. Germany was excluded.

"Waited 8 years for this, what's another 1 in the grand scheme of things?" Johnson-Thompson posted on Twitter. "As an athlete, it's heartbreaking news about the olympics being postponed until 2021, but it's for all the right reasons and the safety of everyone! Hope everyone keeps safe and stay indoors."

Asher-Smith, Britain's world 200m champion, posted on Instagram: "#Tokyo2021. Same fire, new dates. Stay at home and stay safe everyone."

Double Olympic triathlon champion Alistair Brownlee also welcomed the certainty of knowing the outcome after the IOC said as recently as Sunday a decision could take up to four weeks.

"Evidently a very tough decision for the IOC and other stakeholders to make but in my opinion the right one," said Brownlee. "Both, for the message it sends to people around the world battling with the virus and to give clarity to athletes attempting to prepare."

Retired British track cyclist Callum Skinner, who fronts competitor-led movement Global Athlete, said the right decision had been made.

"Tokyo 2021 presents an amazing opportunity to host a full Games celebrating the world (hopefully) entering the "post-pandemic" phase," he tweeted.

TOKYO 1940

In the same way Tokyo 2020 officials have framed the Games as the "Recovery Olympics" after the devastating 2011 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear meltdown, Tokyo cast a bid for 1940 as a chance to show it had recovered from a catastrophic earthquake in 1923.

Spearheaded by legendary Japanese figure Jigoro Kano, the founder of judo and the country's first IOC member, Tokyo was awarded the 1940 Games after ferocious lobbying, including persuading Italian dictator Benito Mussolini to put out of the race.

The Games were supposed to celebrate the 2,600 years since the enthronement of Japan's mythical first emperor Jimmu, but they became untenable because of the country's military aggression in China.

With Japan at war with China from 1937, diplomatic pressure grew for Japan to give up the Games and the military began to question why resources should be diverted from the war effort to fund Olympic construction.

The Japanese Olympic Committee eventually bowed to the inevitable and in 1938 told the IOC it would not be hosting the Games, euphemistically citing the "trouble with China" as the reason.

They also abandoned the winter Games, planned in the northern city of Sapporo.

The IOC awarded the summer Games to Helsinki instead and the winter Games to St. Moritz in Switzerland, but these too fell victim to World War II. Tokyo eventually became the first Asian city to host the Olympics in 1964.

LONDON 1944

Despite what British Prime Minister Winston Churchill called the "gathering storm" over Europe due to Nazi Germany, the IOC met in London in July 1939 to decide which city would host the 1944 Olympics.

They plumped for London, which beat bids by Rome, Detroit, Lausanne and Athens. But only three months later, Britain had declared war on Germany and the 1944 Games was a non-starter. The winter Games were due to be held in Cortina d'Ampezzo in Italy but these were also scrapped. The city hosted the 1956 Winter Olympics and is due to co-host the 2026 Winter Games with Milan.

Just three years after the war ended, and with the world began gradually getting back onto its feet, London hosted what became known as the "Austerity Games" in 1948. Neither Germany nor Japan were invited to participate. —AFP



Dina Asher-Smith

Skinner, who won gold and silver medals at the 2016 Olympics and is a member of the British Olympic Association's (BOA) athletes' commission questioned the IOC's approach.

"Questions have to be asked of Thomas Bach's 'full steam ahead' policy. This saga has endangered athletes, public health and damaged the Olympic movement. What's more he wanted this limbo to continue for 4 weeks"

British Rowing welcomed the "certainty" over the Games. "We are now able to start planning how we best

support our athletes, coaches and all our programme staff throughout this time, both within British Rowing and as a wider group of Olympic and Paralympic sports in the UK," the organisation tweeted.

British Paralympic discus thrower Dan Greaves tweeted: "Absolutely the right decision to postpone both the Olympics & @Paralympics by a year. Health comes first & with that, athletes can now take care of theres to make sure they are able to make the hard work count!!" —AFP

Sports

Coronavirus leaves English cricket facing uncertain season

There will be no sound of leather on willow

LONDON: Despite the early spring chill, English cricketers would normally be turning their thoughts to outdoor practice. Instead, they face a prolonged period in limbo. The impact of the coronavirus means there will be no sound of leather on willow and no hardy supporters wrapped up in woollies braving the bitter early-season conditions.

Last week the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) announced that no professional cricket would be played before May 28 at the earliest. The traditional County Championship, comprising four-day first-class matches, has long had to co-exist with a range of other limited-overs, or white-ball, formats. And this season the plan was to throw the Hundred into the mix, with a cast of high-profile overseas stars including Australia Test captain Steve Smith. ECB chiefs were hoping the Hundred — a 100 balls-per-side tournament featuring eight new franchises, all with men's and women's teams — would attract a new audience.

Former England captain Nasser Hussain has suggested the Championship, much less lucrative for the counties than the Twenty20 Blast, could be scrapped in an unprecedented peacetime move in response to the shortened season.

"One thing the ECB will have to do is prioritise the financial decisions in all this — Test match cricket, white-ball cricket," he told Sky Sports. "Maybe the purist will just have to suck it up this summer with the County Championship. These are the decisions the ECB will have to make with their stakeholders and

their partners." The first-class Championship is the proving ground for the five-day Test format but is often played in front of sparse crowds. Income from white-ball cricket, plus broadcast and commercial revenues from international matches helps keep the 18 first-class counties afloat.

The immediate focus is on options for cricket in June including the three-Test series against West Indies, the Twenty20 Blast and the England Women's schedule against India. Pakistan are also due to play three Tests later in the English summer and Australia have been booked in for several limited-overs matches.

The ECB is modelling a series of options to start the season in June, July or August as it scurries for a solution to a shortened summer. "Alongside our partners in the game, we continue to plan against a

number of scenarios for the cricket season," an ECB spokeswoman told AFP. "It is difficult for us to be sure of what outcomes the game might be expected to deal with.

"These could include the possibility of playing matches behind closed doors, or potentially postponing or cancelling further elements of the season."

Durham chief executive Tim Bostock said if the season were reduced to just two months, it would be better to launch the Hundred next year. "It's pretty clear international cricket comes first then after that it's the (Twenty20) Blast and the Hundred. That's where the revenue is," Bostock told Talksport radio after talks between the counties and the ECB.



Plan to throw the Hundred into the mix



KOLKATA: File photo shows South African cricket players and team officials stand in a queue as they wait for their turn to be scanned amid concerns over the spread of the COVID-19 at a hotel in Kolkata on March 16, 2020. India called off its two remaining one-day cricket internationals against a visiting South Africa side amid mounting anxiety in India over the coronavirus pandemic. — AFP

"Tom Harrison (ECB chief executive) has been really pragmatic. I certainly get the impression if we get a two-month season the pragmatic view would be what's the point of launching this competition now? Let's launch it properly next year. I think we're all on the same page."

Reigning county champions Essex have suggested

regional games between neighbouring teams as a way of keeping first-class cricket going if the usual two-division format has to be abandoned. "Spectators and members would love that and it would also give us some four-day cricket to support England's Test series in a very tight schedule," Essex chief executive Derek Bowden told Sky Sports. —AFP

Guardiola donates one million euros to fight coronavirus

MADRID: Manchester City coach Pep Guardiola has donated one million euros (\$1.08 million) to help buy medical supplies for the fight against the coronavirus pandemic in his native Spain.

The former FC Barcelona boss gave the money to the Medical College of Barcelona to buy "medical equipment that is currently lacking in health centres in Catalonia," the body said in a statement.

His donation will also be used to produce ventilators to treat patients and protective gear for health care workers in Guardiola's northeastern region of Spain. Meanwhile Barcelona's Hospital Clinic said it

had received a donation from FC Barcelona captain Lionel Messi to help it fight the virus.

"Thank you Leo, for your support and commitment," the hospital added in a tweet. While the hospital did not say how much money the player donated, Catalan sports daily Mundo Deportivo said it was one million euros.

With the pandemic spreading across the world, Spain has been one of the worst-hit countries, logging the third highest number of deaths with the latest toll standing at 2,696, and the total number of infections nearing 40,000.

Meanwhile, Cristiano Ronaldo and his agent Jorge Mendes will donate three intensive care units to Portuguese hospitals to help them cope with the coronavirus pandemic, local health officials said on Tuesday.

The Portuguese pair will donate to at least two institutions and will give "two intensive care units", with a "capacity of 10 beds each" to the University Hospital Centre of Northern Lisbon (CHULN), a group

of hospitals in the country's capital city, a spokesman told AFP.

CHULN currently has a capacity of 77 beds. Mendes and Ronaldo will also donate a unit to the Santo Antonio Hospital of the University Hospital Center of Porto. "This is a very important investment that includes more than a dozen respirators and other necessary equipment," Eurico Castro Alves, director of the hospital's surgery department, told newspaper Jornal de Noticias, adding the unit would bear their names. "If necessary, Cristiano Ronaldo would like to do the same in Madeira," he added. Juventus forward Ronaldo has returned to his home island, which has 11 confirmed cases of COVID-19 out of the 2,362 in Portugal. The country has recorded more than 30 deaths.

He was visiting his mother, who is recovering from a stroke, when he was placed in confinement after Juve team-mate Daniele Rugani tested positive. The local authorities said on 12 March Ronaldo showed no symptoms. —AFP

Online gaming booms as virus keep millions at home

HONG KONG: When two Spanish footballers took to the controls of "FIFA 20" after the coronavirus pandemic saw their La Liga match cancelled, a stadium-sized virtual audience watched online.

The huge digital crowd last week is part of a spectacular boom for the digital gaming industry, as record numbers flock to online servers for distraction, entertainment and friendship with the "real world" seemingly falling apart.

Real Betis striker Borja Iglesias kicked the winning goal using his own digital likeness in the 6-5 battle against Sevilla, which was broadcast on popular video game streaming platform Twitch.

It took place at the same time the original derby had been scheduled, before Spain's premier tournament was postponed as part of containment measures that have also seen the country's 46 million people largely confined to their homes.

"We do all of this to entertain all of you, so that you can be at home enjoying it, insofar as it is possible with this epidemic," the host of the broadcast told his audience of 60,000. Nearly every country around the globe has reported cases of COVID-19 infection, with frantic efforts to contain the disease prompting the near total shutdown of some of the world's biggest cities. Online gaming has proved a welcome diversion for many people chafing at movement restrictions, the cancellation of countless public events and a relentless onslaught of news about the pandemic.

"It made me feel less depressed about being in a small space for a long time," said Yang An, who was made to quarantine for two weeks in China after returning to Shanghai from her hometown last month. She told AFP that she passed the time by playing for up to eight hours a day on her Nintendo Switch handheld console.

Internet providers have scrambled to shore up their networks in the face of surging demand. Gaming traffic on Verizon's network shot up an "unprecedented" 75 percent in the space of a week, the US telco said recently.

Software companies have also rushed to accommodate a record number of users. Rockstar Games, publisher of the Wild West-themed adventure title "Red Dead Redemption", promised players it would keep its online servers running smoothly after it told its global workforce to work from home.

The company also teased a roll-out of extra in-game activities to keep housebound player glued to their controllers. Online gaming communities could "go some of the way to create the public space that's been lost" in the wake of the pandemic, said Christian McCrea, a media studies lecturer specialising in games at Australia's RMIT University. He pointed to Pokemon Go — a smartphone game that became a worldwide phenomenon in 2016 when it lured millions of people onto the streets for a virtual monster hunt — which was this month tweaked by its developer to make it easier for users to play at home.

McCrea said gaming habits were likely to see a massive transformation in the months ahead, with the prospect of further economic ructions and long stretches of social isolation looming on the horizon. "Overall the big impact will be younger kids at home for months on end with parents out of work," he told AFP. "Games will be at the centre of a lot of their spare time."

Video games have long been blamed for a causing a suite of health issues, from repetitive strain injuries to eyesight problems. The World Health Organization classified gaming addiction as an illness in 2018, the same year China launched a crackdown on the industry on concerns that youngsters were spending too much time online. — AFP

Lochte ready to set sights on 2021

LOS ANGELES: US Swimmer Ryan Lochte's Olympic window may be closing, but the 35-year-old says he's ready to push on another year after the 2020 Tokyo Games were postponed because of the coronavirus pandemic.

"I was a little pissed off because I've been training my butt off and I've been feeling great," the 12-time Olympic medalist told the Los Angeles Times on Tuesday. "This Olympics was going to be the most important of my career because of everything that's happened in my past."

"But this whole thing is way bigger than me," Lochte added. "It's way bigger than the Olympians, it's affecting the entire world right now." Lochte won the first of his six Olympic gold medals as a relay swimmer in Athens. More gold followed in Beijing in 2008, London in 2012 and Rio de Janeiro in 2016. But he was suspended from swimming for 10 months after a scandal at Rio, when he was found to have fabricated a story about a robbery during a drunken late-night episode in the Olympic host city.

He received a further 14-month ban by the US Anti-Doping Agency for taking a banned intravenous



Ryan Lochte

infusion of vitamins in May of 2018 — returning last year to launch his latest Olympic bid after undergoing treatment for alcohol abuse and starting a family with his wife, Kayla.

The couple have two children, son, Caiden and daughter Liv. "There's still so much more I want to accomplish in this sport," Lochte said. "I'm not going to let this get in the way of it." — AFP

Panthers officially part ways with Cam Newton

WASHINGTON: The Carolina Panthers confirmed their parting with quarterback Cam Newton, releasing their quarterback of nine years. "Cam has meant a lot to this organization and the Carolinas," general manager Marty Hurney said in a statement. "Everyone saw his performances on the field. I had the privilege of seeing how hard he worked off the field, and his commitment to this team when no one was watching."

"He willed this team to victory on many occasions and will always be considered one of the greatest players in the history of this franchise." The kind words come a week after Newton took the Panthers to task after the team seemed to indicate he had sought to be traded as the club finalized a deal for quarterback Teddy Bridgewater.

"Stop with the word play!!" Newton, the 2015 NFL Most Valuable Player, wrote on Instagram. "I never asked

for it!! There is no dodging this one. I love the Panthers to death and will always love you guys!!

"Please do not try and play me, or manipulate the narrative and act like I wanted this; you forced me into this!!" As recently as January, Newton said he "absolutely" believed he would be in Carolina in the coming season. In recent weeks the Panthers reportedly explored trade options with several teams, but no deal materialized for the 30-year-old Newton, who has dealt with a string of injuries. After two shoulder surgeries in less than two years, he was sidelined much of 2019 with a left foot injury.

Newton, who had one year left on his contract and was owed \$21.1 million, was the top pick in the 2011 NFL draft. He was the NFL's Offensive Rookie of the Year that season and in 2015 led the Panthers to a Super Bowl appearance in which they were beaten by the Denver Broncos. Earlier, NFL commissioner Roger Goodell has instructed clubs to close all team facilities, stepping up league efforts to combat the spread of new coronavirus.

According to a memo sent to all league clubs and reported on NFL.com, the shutdowns will continue to at least April 8. Goodell told the teams the rules are meant to "ensure that all clubs operate on a level playing field, and that the NFL continues to conduct itself in a responsible way at this time."

All NFL clubs had already suspended normal business

operations and barred players from team facilities unless they were there to receive medical treatment. Most if not all clubs had a limited number of staff working in their offices even as health authorities around the United States recommended people stay at home in a bid to slow the spread of the virus.

Now Goodell has told clubs that from yesterday night the only personnel allowed at team facilities will be those providing ongoing medical treatment to players, and those required to maintain the security and operational capabilities of the facilities.

Teams will still be free to conduct the signing of players, long-distance evaluation of draft prospects, ticket sales and other tasks preparing for the 2020 season. "The challenges we face are not unique — many businesses and individuals throughout the country are experiencing and addressing similar issues," Goodell said. "Please be assured that the NFL is well-positioned to meet these operational challenges as we prepare to offer our fans and the country an outstanding 2020 NFL season."

The annual NFL draft of new talent is still scheduled to take place April 23-24, although the public events surrounding the selection process that had been planned in Las Vegas have been cancelled. The 2020 NFL season is due to begin on September 10. — AFP

18 Prospective Olympians give postponement plenty of likes



19 Coronavirus leaves English cricket facing uncertain season



19 Lochte ready to set sights on 2021



Olympic delay puts Japan in a spin



TOKYO: People wearing face masks, amid concerns over the spread of the COVID-19, walk past a countdown display for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games with notices which read in Japanese "Under adjustment" in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP

TOKYO: Japan's media and athletes reacted with disappointment yesterday to the postponement of the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, but expressed relief the Games had not been cancelled altogether over the coronavirus pandemic.

The postponement, unprecedented in peacetime, came after heavy pressure from athletes around the world and followed an admission from Japan's prime minister that a delay was now "inevitable".

But there was still shock and disappointment in Japan, where the Games have been promoted as the "Recovery Olympics", intended to showcase reconstruction after the devastating 2011 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster.

The Nikkei business daily said Japan had avoided the worst-case scenario of a cancellation, but "it is like all the efforts of the last seven years are now back to square one". "It is inevitable that huge additional costs will emerge," it added.

The Tokyo Shimbun headlined its coverage "surprise and embarrassment", but conceded in an article

that the situation left organisers and Olympic officials with few options. "Choosing a one-year postponement was a decision taken by a process of elimination," the paper said, with an Olympics this year seen as too risky and a longer delay to 2022 likely to be too expensive.

The newspaper expressed disappointment with the way the IOC handled the decision, clinging for weeks to the line that the Games could still open as scheduled on July 24, before reversing course.

"We didn't see the strong leadership that had been hoped for," the paper said. Athletes in Japan said they were disappointed, but committed to training towards the rescheduled Games. "Honestly speaking, my mind is still spinning," sports climber Akiyo Noguchi wrote in a post on her Instagram page.

"But I'm taking it positively since I'll be able to spend more time doing the sport I love," added Noguchi, who plans to make the Tokyo Games her last Olympics. "I will spend the time I have been given to be stronger both physically and mentally," she added.

"For now, I hope the world will overcome this situation as soon as possible, and that the Olympics will be held in Tokyo."

'BEST SCENARIO'

Jun Mizutani, the 30-year-old Japanese table tennis player who competed at the Beijing, London and Rio Games, reacted lightheartedly to the news, tweeting a digitally aged photo of himself with the message: "I can do it".

Athletes and sports associations around the world had pushed for the move given the effects the virus

has had on everything from qualifiers to training, so the final decision was far from a shock. "We were ready as the mood for postponement was growing," Toshihisa Tsuchihashi of the Japan Tennis Association told the Nikkan sports daily.

"I think it's a wise decision. I guess players will have mixed feelings, but I believe they will reset and do their best. I'll support them." And Ichiro Hoshino, a senior director of the Japan Table Tennis Association, told the daily it had become clear that holding the Games this summer was impossible.

"But I also feel that it was good that it was not cancelled amid this serious situation," he said. "I'd say it will be good for athletes as (the situation) has become a little more predictable." Both the IOC and Japanese organisers and officials have insisted that cancellation is not on the table, with the goal now to hold the rescheduled Games by summer 2021 at the latest.

Under the circumstances, wrote the conservative Sankei Shimbun daily, the decision of a one-year postponement was "the best scenario". —AFP

“ Back to square one ”

Relieved US athletes welcome Olympic postponement

LOS ANGELES: United States athletes welcomed the decision to postpone the Tokyo Olympics on Tuesday, exhaling a collective sigh of relief tinged with disappointment as they began to set their sights on 2021.

The deadly coronavirus pandemic has swept into all 50 states of America, leaving US athletes' years of carefully choreographed Olympic training plans in tatters. Powerhouse swimmer Katie Ledecky, expected to be one of the stars of the Tokyo Games, had been left without a pool to train in as restrictions in California shut down the Stanford University facilities.

Track and field star Noah Lyles — the reigning 200m world champion — had been denied regular access to a running track. Instead Lyles, who suffers from allergies and asthma, had been forced to train in

a Florida park.

Lyles and Ledecky's problems had become all too common for US athletes, who found themselves torn between the need to comply with local regulations restricting non-essential movement while simultaneously sticking to training regimens designed to help them prepare for Tokyo.

Lyles had no reservations about the decision to postpone the Games — and vowed to be ready for Tokyo in 2021.

'SAFETY FIRST'

"Straight up I'm tired of hearing I'm sorry like my puppy just died," Lyles wrote on Twitter. "We will overcome this like everything else and then go win the Gold in 2021!" US sprint star Allyson Felix, whose six Olympic golds are the most for any female track and field athlete, said the delay won't halt her bid for a last share of Games glory.

"I am not sure what the future holds, but my goals have not changed," she wrote in an article posted on Time.com. "I still hope to experience the feeling of standing on that podium in 2021 and I hope my journey to try to get back there will inspire you to keep moving forward."

In a later interview with NBC, Lyles said the safety of athletes was paramount. "The last thing we want is for anybody to get sick," Lyles told NBC. "I can train for another year, but if the whole world goes through a crisis and everybody gets sick, we won't have an Olympics at all."

Lyles had already achieved a qualifying standard to compete in Tokyo. But the 22-year-old believes many athletes would have missed out through not being able to train properly had the games gone ahead. "It would have been very hard for a lot of us to even get a qualifying time," he said. Ledecky described an increasingly fraught hunt for facilities after her regular training pool at Stanford was closed.

She went seven days without putting a toe in the water, and finally swam over the weekend in a private pool in someone's backyard. "At certain points there were times we didn't know if cancellation was still on the table or if there could be a postponement until the end of this year or some other time," she told The Washington Post. "It's good to have clarity now."

'SNEAKING AROUND'

Ledecky's US swimming teammate Nathan Adrian spoke of mixed emotions after learning of the post-

ponement. "Disappointment, obviously, because we'd be training for four years...but then the other side of the coin is relief," said Adrian, 31, who had been targeting a fourth Olympic Games appearance.

Adrian, who underwent surgery for testicular cancer last year, is from Washington state, the initial epicenter of the COVID-19 crisis in the US.

"My parents are still up there along with my brother and sister. And my parents are in the risk category. I feel guilty if I'm trying to go out and train, sneaking around trying to find a gray area that allows me to get into a pool or lift some weights," he told NBC. Other athletes took a defiant stance, immediately turning their attention to a Tokyo Olympics sometime in 2021.

"We train hard. We put our blood, sweat and tears into this," said Emma Coburn, the 2017 women's steeplechase world champion. "Our dreams are not cancelled, they are just postponed."

Rai Benjamin, the 400m hurdles silver medalist at last year's World Championships, acknowledged disappointment in a social media post. "This was THE year. The work, the sacrifice, the determination, but I understand," Benjamin wrote. "Everyone stay safe and Tokyo we'll see you soon." —AFP